



Arcade Dreams by chloerigby

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Summary: There's a new girl working at the Palace Arcade and Hawkins' Family Video. Billy can't stand her, and the feeling is mutual. No matter what everyone else seems to think.

1. Chapter 1

A/N: When being introduced to the Midnight overlaps with the third season of Stranger Things being released, you write a Billy Hargrove fic. He's trying his best to become a soft boy, but instead you all get this mess of a slow burn fic.

Christmas break was surprisingly more lively in Hawkins than Teddi had anticipated. The Hawkins Family Video store and the Palace Arcade were always pretty popular during weekends, sure, but in the few days since school had let out she had found herself bouncing back and forth between the two shops because she and Keith were *seriously* understaffed. She didn't mind it. Everyone in town was surprisingly nice, and a lot of the kids that stopped into the arcade were pretty entertaining. There was one group she had taken a liking to. Max Mayfield and her gang always managed to make a shift more exciting, and she *loved* helping them give Keith grief.

She had popped into the arcade about twenty minutes ago and found them spread out amongst the games. Max seemed to be missing, but there was a new girl that had tagged along the last few nights. Apparently Chief Hopper had a daughter she hadn't known about. Not that that surprised her. As of that week she had only been in Hawkins for two months. Her family had moved there from upstate New York after her dad had been laid off. Now they lived in a *really* crappy place that seemed like it was in the middle of nowhere even for Indiana. It was why she had taken the video store/arcade job to begin with. There was no way her parents would be able to pay for college now. So now she was desperate for as many shifts as she could get from Keith on top of looking for a second job.

Since the arcade seemed to be relatively peaceful for a Friday night, she was focused on the video store now. Keith was forcing her to play that god awful animated Rudolph movie on repeat to get customers into the Christmas spirit. If she had to listen to that elf talk about how he wanted to be a dentist one more time, she might actually lose it. She was bouncing back and forth between the register, restocking and organizing shelves and rewinding tapes people had returned. She was so busy that she had managed to drown out those awful

claymation characters *and* the sound of a roaring engine outside. She threw a "Welcome to Hawkins' Video!" over her shoulder when she heard the bell on the door jingle as it opened.

She was tidying up the holiday display when someone's shadow loomed over her. "You work here?" a gruff voice asked. Teddi looked up, eyebrows together in confusion as she tried to imagine what this guy could possibly be so huffy about.

"Sure do," she said as she stood. She was immediately met with the smell of cologne, cigarette smoke and spearmint. "What can I help you with?"

Teddi vaguely recognized him after a few moments. They went to the same school. She didn't entirely remember his name, but she knew he was kind of a dick. Very, *very* cute, but kind of a dick. "I'm stuck watching my lame ass step-sister while she's grounded. Her mom told me to rent some videos to keep her occupied over the weekend." he said rolling his eyes.

"Oh! Well, that's actually pretty sweet of you. I mean I'm an only child so my mom always just threw me in front of a TV while I was growing up..." she trailed off. It was obvious he didn't care. Teddi cleared her throat. "Sorry. Um, so what's she into?"

He raised an eyebrow, looking at Teddi like she had grown a second head. "How the fuck should I know?"

"Isn't she your sister?"

"*Step* sister." he corrected shortly.

"Right..." Teddi pursed her lips while she thought of a suggestion. Cute but dickly blonde boy shifted impatiently. "Chick flick?" she asked. He made a face.

"Jesus, no. She's not into all that girly shit." he paused for a moment. "I don't know, she was Michael Myers for Halloween. You got anything like that?"

Teddi perked up. "Oh, totally! Here, follow me," she waved at him and took off towards the horror section. She glanced over her

shoulder quickly at him. "...You go to Hawkin's High, right? You're on the basketball team? I'm Teddi. I just moved here so you've probably haven't seen me or anything..." she was rambling again. She always did that when things were quiet. She hated quiet.

"You're the weird girl that argued with the science teacher for like half an hour over crystals." he said bluntly. Teddi let out a nervous laugh. She had to admit, it was a little embarrassing to remembered by cute but dickly for arguing that crystals *did* in fact have healing abilities, and *no* it did not have anything to do with the movie The Dark Crystal.

"Yep...yep. That was me..." she was fairly certain she heard him let out a faint chuckle. "So uh, keeping in tone with the whole holiday horror she might like this one," she plucked a copy of Black Christmas off the shelf and handed it to him. He gave it a quick look over and gave an approving nod. "And these are just some really good ones. You can't pass them up." she handed him Sleepaway Camp, Alien and Carrie. She hoped it would be broad enough range to keep his sister occupied and happy.

He scanned each VHS quickly. "Right...thanks. Hopefully this'll keep the little shit happy." he muttered.

"It's no problem. If she likes them there's plenty more where those came from." she said leading him back to the front counter. While she was checking each of the movies out she was completely oblivious to the fact that cute but dickly was now aware that his focus was no longer on renting movies and that Teddi was a *girl*. A cute, but *weird*, girl that he had yet to put the moves on.

"...I'm Billy, by the way. I forgot to introduce myself earlier." he grinned, leaning against the counter and turning on a sudden charm he definitely hadn't had when he first walked in. Teddi had bleached blonde hair that was cut into a bob that just barely reached her shoulders. Her lashes were so long and thick that he couldn't tell whether they were real or fake. Freckles speckled her nose and she had a metal hoop in her right nostril. She was also wearing glittery lip gloss that managed to sparkle even under the fluorescent lighting of the video store. He barely got to get a good look of her "Hawkins' Family Video" shirt that was about two sizes too small and black cut

off shorts before he was caught.

"Oh, it's fine we were bus-...what are you doing?" she raised an eyebrow at him.

Billy stood up straight, his grin fading. "...What do you mean?"

"You were just looking at me like I'm like a cheeseburger or something," she snorted. Billy looked at her like she had grown another head yet again. "Does that actually *work*?" she asked, her nose scrunching just a little.

Billy clenched his jaw, resting both of his hands on the counter. "What the hell is that supposed to mean?" he spat. It only made him more annoyed when Teddi let out a giggle. If it was one thing he hated, it was being laughed at.

"Nothing. Forget it," she slid the tapes towards him. "Ten bucks. They're due back Monday." she said with an amused smile. Billy only muttered, reaching into his back pocket and digging his wallet out. He tossed a ten down on the counter and snatched up the tapes. "Enjoy the movies!" she said sweetly.

Billy rolled his eyes and nearly stomped back out to his car. He *hated* Hawkins. He hated how cold it was. He hated how festive everyone got around Christmas. He hated that he was stuck at home with Max all weekend, and he hated that Teddi had embarrassed him. *Fuck Hawkins*, he thought as he slid into his Camaro.

"Took you long enough," Max muttered, crossing her arms. Billy ignored her and tossed the tapes into her lap before throwing the car into reverse. Max silently studied each of the movies. "These look pretty good...you picked these out?" she asked with a raised eyebrow.

Billy fished his cigarettes from his jacket pocket and placed one between his lips. "The girl that worked there picked them out," he mumbled before lighting it. "I told her you liked Halloween." for some reason that excited Max.

"Teddi?" she asked, turning to face her step-brother.

Billy cast a sideways glance at her. "Yeah...you know her?"

"She works at the arcade too. She's *really* cool." Billy scoffed. What did Max know about cool? He supposed to a geek like Max and her friends that maybe Teddi seemed cool. He sure didn't see it.

"She's weird." he argued curtly.

Max gave him a knowing look and smiled. "You asked her out didn't you? She said no didn't she?" she asked excitedly. Billy gripped the steering wheel tightly.

He bit back his initial response. "She's not my type." he said simply.

It was Max's turn to scoff. "You don't *have* a type. *Girl* is your type. She's too smart for you anyways."

"Max, do you ever shut the fuck up? It's bad enough I have to spend the weekend with you. Do you really think I give a shit about what you have to say about some freak that works at the video store?" Max only rolled her eyes. Ever since the night Billy had come to find her at the Byers' house things with Billy had been slightly better, but not great. Her step-brother was stubborn. And while she was sure she had put the fear of God in him that night, Max was sure there was nothing that would be able to match his attitude.

Billy leaned forward and flipped the radio on to signal he was done with the conversation. He drummed his fingers against the wheel in sync with the beat and pretended Max was no longer there. But still, the fact that he had actually tried to find movies she'd like instead of grabbing whatever was closest let her know he didn't *completely* hate her. If anything he was crabby because his ego was bruised from whatever happened between him and Teddi.

Max was positive Billy had tried to ask her out. Lucas and the guys all had a crush on her. She was into all the same stuff they were, and she was nicer than Steve. Max had found herself wishing a few times that Teddi could be her step-sister rather than having to stick around Billy. Or at the very least she wished that Billy wasn't such a jerk and that Teddi would *want* to date him. Maybe make him chill out some.

Max's mom and Neil weren't home when they pulled into the driveway. Usually on the weekends they went out and she and Billy

wouldn't see them much if they were home. Which wasn't often. Both Billy and Max liked to avoid being home as often as possible. Max followed Billy inside and kicked off her snow-covered boots, hanging up her coat and rushing over to the TV. Billy tossed his leather jacket onto the back of the couch and headed for the kitchen. Max heard the pop of a beer can being opened.

She decided to watch Black Christmas first. She popped the tape in, settling own on the floor to watch. She barely even noticed Billy standing awkwardly in the doorway. "...You want popcorn or something?" he finally asked. Max tried to mask her surprise, instead smiling and nodding. He disappeared into the kitchen once more, making sure to slam cabinet doors and the microwave as if he were being forced to cook up popcorn.

Billy returned a few moments later, plopping down on the couch and setting the bowl on the table in front of him. Max moved from her place on the floor to the couch as he kicked off his boots and leaned back into the couch. He rolled his eyes as she gave him a happy smile, grabbing the popcorn bowl and settling into the couch herself. While he still wished he was out with some girl he could pick up at work, Billy supposed this wasn't the *worst* way to spend the weekend.

2. Chapter 2

When Teddi said that she was desperate for cash, she meant it. After she had secured her job at the video store she had driven around Hawkins and applied to literally every place in town that had been hiring. On Thursday night she had gotten a call from one of the lifeguards at the public pool. They were in dire need of some new staff and asked if she'd be willing to help out on Saturday. During the Fall and Winter they taught swimming lessons at the Hawkins High indoor pool, and seeing as Teddi spent most of her time these days around kids she figured she could handle it.

It was a part time job. Her shift would end in time for her to still make it into the video store and they were paying surprisingly well. It almost seemed too good to be true. But she brushed the feeling off. There was no way she was turning down the cash. Even if the kids in class started vomiting pea soup while their heads spun around.

She showed up twenty minutes before her shift. It was a habit. Teddi had a problem sitting still and she'd rather look like overzealous than sit in her car and watch the minutes tick by. And thankfully she knew someone she'd be working with. A girl named Heather that she had a few classes with. She was nice, even for being one of the popular girls. "You have *no* idea how glad I am you're here," Heather said with a grateful sigh. She was leading Teddi to a supply closet to find her a suit and whistle. "We've been spreading ourselves out pretty thin. I was sitting up there nearly my entire shift yesterday while the guys handled everything else," she said, nodding to the tall chair that overlooked the pool. "They were running around like headless chickens" she laughed.

A guy named Freddy had been the one that called Teddi about the job. And Heather had mentioned a girl named Katie would be the one to relieve Teddi at the end of her shift. If there was anyone else, Heather hadn't mentioned them yet. "Okay, so the girl's locker room is right over there so you can change. I'm up first on the seat, so I think Freddy is gonna find someone to show you around. He's handling the only class we have today so you don't have to worry about that. And training is pretty simple. You'll catch on in no time,

don't worry." Heather said with a reassuring smile.

"Oh yeah, don't worry about me! I worked at the pool back home for a few summers," she waved a hand. "You go and I'll find Freddy. Holler if you need anything." Teddi assured her. Heather gave a playful salute and walked off to get the gym ready to open and Teddi ducked into the locker room.

Billy swung the gym door open, removing his sunglasses and tucking them into the front of his crewneck sweater. He gave a short wave to Heather before disappearing into the small room that they had claimed as their break room. Freddy was already there, parked in front of the vending machine as he decided on a snack. "Hey, Hargrove," he greeted. "I got a favor. We have a new girl starting today. Can you show her around?"

Billy raised an eyebrow. "New girl? When did that happen?" he knew Heather and Freddy had been considering hiring someone new for awhile. Things definitely weren't as busy as they would be during the summer, but the amount of kids looking for something to do during school break was running them thin.

"Hired her Thursday. She's just here for a few hours a day, but it's when things are busiest. But y'know, don't go scaring her off huh?" he teased. Billy chuckled. He had to admit, there had been a few girls that had come and gone in the short time since he had been hired. He couldn't make any promises.

"Yeah, yeah. I got it. So no testing her on her CPR skills then, huh?" he joked. He pulled his sweater off, throwing it into his duffel bag and tossing it aside. Freddy laughed and shook his head, calling 'later, dude' as Billy walked back out to the pool. He froze when he saw the girl's locker room door swing open and Teddi walk out. *Great.* Freddy definitely wouldn't have to worry about him chasing this one off. If anything it would be the other way around.

Teddi was surprised to see Billy there. She never would have guessed he'd be a lifeguard, or rather anything that dealt with kids. She was also surprised to see how *annoyed* he looked once he spotted her. Teddi watched as he made his way over with that angry stomp of his, admittedly very confused as to why he seemed so bothered by her.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

Teddi blinked a few times. "Uh...I work here." she offered, looking down at her swimsuit that read "Hawkins pool lifeguard" like his own. Now it was her turn to look at him like he had grown a second head.

"You work at the video store." he said with an accusing tone.

"*True*. But I needed the extra cash...should I lie and say I'm here to ruin your life? That kinda seems like the answer you're looking for..." she tilted her head to the side. Billy let out a short huff. Teddi wondered briefly if he was still upset about the night before. After he stormed out, Keith had explained that Billy was somewhat of a ladies man. So the fact that she not only hadn't been drooling over him, but *teased* him had probably hadn't made him too happy. She had to admit it was a little funny though. Men could be so *sensitive*.

But Billy didn't say anything. He simply turned away and stalked off. Teddi paused briefly before rushing to catch up to him. "Are you gonna be the one showing me around?" she asked. He only let out a grunt. "I'll take that as a yes...is this because of last night? Look, I'm sorry if I embarrassed you-"

Billy let out a harsh laugh. "You really think *you* could embarrass me?" He asked as he lead her into a laundry room. "I don't give a shit if some *weird girl* isn't into me." Teddy definitely didn't miss how defensive his tone was. He was so worked up that he didn't even bother explaining what they were doing. He just dumped out a basket of dirty towels onto a fold out table and started sorting them.

Teddi tried to mask the amused look on her face as she watched him. His jaw was clenched tightly as he worked and the tops of his ears were growing red. She joined in to help him sort the different sized towels. "I didn't-"

"I am *swimming* in pussy-" he spat. Teddi cut off whatever else he was about to say with a loud snort. Billy looked at her incredulously. What the fuck was up with this chick?

"Did you *honestly* just say that?" She asked, still snickering. "God,

you're just a regular Prince Charming aren't you?"

Billy leaned forward and gave Teddi an accusing look. "What are you, like a lesbian or something?" that for some reason only made Teddi laugh harder. "What the *fuck* is so funny?" he demanded.

Teddi shook her head, her laughter dying down. "Nothing. Sorry. It's just...you think because a girl isn't all over you that it means she's a lesbian?" she asked, her laughter bubbling back up again. "No, I'm not a lesbian. I just don't like assholes."

Billy scoffed and shook his head. He gathered up a pile of towels and threw them in the wash before grabbing new, clean towels from the dryer and bringing them back to the table. The pair silently began folding towels. Teddi hated it. "...Did your sister like the movies?" she finally asked, fully prepared for more snappy remarks.

Billy narrowed his eyes at her as if she were speaking another language. "What? Oh...I don't know, I guess," he shrugged.

"Did *you* like it?" she asked carefully.

Billy was quiet for a moment, like he was trying to decide whether he had or not. "...I've seen worse." he finally said. Teddi guessed that was as close to a compliment as she'd ever get from him.

"You don't seem to be the type to go to the movies a lot." she observed. It was hard to imagine a guy like Billy being cooped up in a theater or choosing to stay home with a rental instead of doing...*whatever* it was that he liked to do.

"If I do I'm sure as hell not watching the movie." he smirked. Teddi rolled her eyes. He just couldn't turn it off. But she'd take the mindless flirt over his antichrist side. She wouldn't push her luck though. Teddi went back to silently folding towels, extremely grateful when Billy flipped on the radio that was sitting a little precariously on a fold out chair in the corner of the room.

He could practically hear Max giving him shit for being an asshole. He resisted the urge to roll his eyes. '*You need to learn how to chill the hell out*', she had said. '*You can't keep acting like such a psychopath*'. So

he started to learn to bite his tongue a little more often. He noticed people didn't mind being around him as much now. He could joke around with Freddy and the girls at work. Things felt just a little bit more normal. A little bit more like back home. But *god* sometimes it was hard to keep the anger at bay.

"What do you need the cash for?" He asked suddenly. Teddi looked up at him, her eyebrows raised in surprise. "You said you needed extra cash. What's it for?" He corrected himself.

"Oh, yeah. Well, mainly college I guess," the look on his face told her that was exactly the answer he had been expecting. "Honestly if it'll get me out of here then I'll take it." she said with a shrug.

Billy raised an eyebrow. Aside from maybe Max, he hadn't met anyone else that didn't love living in Hawkins. "You hate it here too, huh?"

Teddi looked around as if someone was listening in before letting out a heavy sigh. "It's so *cold*. I mean, don't get me wrong, it's cold in New York. But there was at least stuff to do. All there is here is the video store, the arcade and...cows. I don't know how people stand it." she was surprised when Billy actually laughed. A genuine laugh.

"Yeah," he nodded. "I'd rather chew off my own foot than stay in this shit hole much longer." *that's something at least*, Teddi thought. Something they had in common. It wasn't like she was going to go out of her way to become friends with Billy. If that was even possible. But if they were going to work together she at least wanted to be able to be in the same room without him wanting to strangle her.

There was something she couldn't really figure out about Billy. He wasn't just your average angry guy. Her dad was an angry guy. He had two modes. Angry and quiet. Thankfully over the last few years the quiet side had taken most of the control. But with Billy it didn't seem like it was just hot and cold. Angry and quiet. There were these moments that would peek out where she could see him as a *nice* guy. A little cranky, but a nice guy. But then they were gone almost as fast as they arrived.

She decided she wouldn't press on the matter. She didn't want to get

involved with whatever was going on with him. She would be cordial, and that was that. Mostly anything to keep him from saying pussy ever again.

So they worked in silence to finish up the rest of the laundry. Billy gave her a tour, gave her a brief rundown of the pool rules and showed her where they kept the pool chemicals, supplies for lessons and anything else she might need. And while there were no more arguments between them, Teddi had to keep herself from rolling her eyes every time she caught Billy blatantly checking her out.

Before she knew it her shift was up. She headed back to the locker room to change back into her winter wear and stopped by Billy who had relieved Heather from her post. "So, thanks for showing me around. I'll see you tomorrow?"

Billy looked almost surprised she was thanking him. "Uh, yeah, sure...later." he mumbled awkwardly. He wouldn't meet her eyes, almost like if anyone overheard their conversation they'd think he wasn't *cool* anymore. Teddi only let out a small laugh, waving at him and heading out into the cold, wintery weather. She decided this would be a good fit. It got her out of the house for a few extra hours, and Billy wasn't anything she couldn't handle.

3. Chapter 3

A/N: Thank you so much for all the comments and favorites! I'm so glad you like the fic! I've made a spotify playlist, just look up hunnywrites!

It was Monday night. Teddi was bouncing back and forth between the video store and arcade. Some kid was having a birthday party and there were about fifteen eight year olds running around with icing smudged all over their faces. Keith definitely wasn't going to be the one to handle them. The older kids harassed him, sure, but the little ones *terrorized* him. Teddi had lost count of how many times she'd seen the elementary kids throwing their shitty prizes at him from across the prize counter or blatantly ignored his pleas for them to stop running and acting like a bunch of "crackheads". But she'd be lying if she said she didn't find it a *little* funny.

So now she was busy following around a group of small children and wiping down the machines after their grimy little hands got cake and god only knows what else on the controls. "Teddi!" she turned to see who had called her, smiling at the two boys who were waving wildly at her from across the room. She made her way over, giving Lucas and Dustin each a high five.

"How's it goin' dudes? The crew's not in tonight?" Mike, Will and the girl who she had learned was named El had been in all weekend, but she hadn't seen Max in a few days, which was unusual. "Hey, is everything okay with Max? I haven't seen her tagging along in awhile."

Lucas made a face. "She got grounded. Two more days until she's free. Will's mom just came and picked him, Mike and El up though." he explained, jabbing a thumb at the front door.

"Yeah, two more days until Lucas can see his *girlfriend*." Dustin teased, poking his best friend in the side. Lucas slapped his hands away and muttered a "Shut *up*."

Teddi laughed, raising an eyebrow. "Girlfriend? You can't be dating, you guys are babies!" she couldn't really be too surprised though.

Anyone could see the puppy dog eyes Lucas and Max

had been flashing each other since she'd moved to Hawkins.

"Hey, hey! We're *men*." Dustin corrected her.

Lucas rolled his eyes, turning to Teddi. "So...can we?" He asked. Dustin perked up next to him. About a month ago, Dustin had found a way to trick the ticket counter into giving out more tickets. The gang had made a top secret mission out of it to keep the secret from Keith and the other kids at the arcade. But Teddi had been an important part in their scheme as long as she was willing.

"You know, you guys could always just save up your tickets. Try being *patient*." she offered with an amused smile.

Lucas pulled a face. "Do you have any idea how *long* that would take? We're halfway there! After tonight that bike is ours, and Christmas is *next week*. We're on a deadline here, Teddi!" he reasoned. It was sweet really. There was this little white bicycle that had been hanging above the prize counter longer than she had been working there. The gang had all decided to pool their tickets together and give the bike to El for Christmas.

Teddi looked around the arcade and let out a heavy sigh. "Alright. You have twenty minutes until Keith gets back from his break. If anyone gives you shit just tell them you're doing me a favor since I'm busy, okay? I gotta go check on things next door." it was a risky move for the both of them to try and pull this off without the others, but Teddi knew they'd be able to pull it off.

"Yes!" they both cried. "Thank you, Teddi!" Dustin yelled before grabbing Lucas by the arm and pulling him along. Teddi shook her head, turning and heading back to the video store.

Things were quiet over there at least. There was a group of younger girls arguing over what movie to rent for the night and a kid begging with his parents to let him rent Friday the 13th. She decided to start going through the returns when the bell on the door rang and a small redhead ran in with a stack of tapes.

"Maxamillion!" Teddi greeted. While she liked all of Max's friends, Teddi had a soft spot for her. She was sure that it was because she reminded Teddi so much of herself when she was her age. "I was just asking Lucas and Dustin about you, heard you got grounded." She said with a teasing, stern look.

Max rolled her eyes and nodded, setting the tapes on the counter. "My mom *totally* shit a fit. And Billy's been all pissy because he has to watch me. But these movies were *awesome*. He even liked them. And he hates everything."

Teddi raised an eyebrow and looked down at the tapes Max was returning. Black Christmas, Alien, Sleepaway Camp and Carrie. "Wait, *you're* Billy's sister?" how hadn't she put that together? Max had always said her brother was a dick, and Teddi didn't know anyone in Hawkins who was a bigger dick than Billy.

"*Step*-sister." Max corrected. And speak of the devil, in waltzed Billy himself with a cigarette between his lips and his shirt unbuttoned practically down to his belly button. Teddi scoffed loudly.

"There's no smoking in here, Hargrove." she said, her hands on her hips. Billy sauntered over, leaning against the counter and removing the cigarette from his lips before blowing a cloud of smoke in her face. She wanted to smack the smirk off his face.

"Bite me, Larsson," he grinned. Teddi leaned forward and snatched the cigarette from his fingers, putting it out on the counter with an overly sweet smile. Max watched the exchange with an exhausted look. "...You're a real bitch sometimes, you know that?" he muttered.

"Yeah? Well, in here you're my bitch," he glared at Max when she let out a snort. "You didn't tell me that Max was your step-sister," she said, changing the subject. "You're totally not cool enough to be related to her in any way." she teased.

Billy rolled his eyes. "*Please*. What do either of you know about being cool?"

Max gave him an unimpressed look. "She's *way* cooler than you."

"Jesus, will you shut up and get some new tapes already? I don't wanna hear Susan bitch about how long we took." Max let out an over dramatic sigh and ran off to find something new to watch for the night. Billy's fingers were tapping rapidly on the counter, clearly desperate for another smoke.

"...Rough night?" Teddi asked. He seemed a bit more on edge than usual. Paranoid. Like at any second shit was going to hit the fan.

"Fuck off, Teddi." he spat. She rolled her eyes, but held her hands up in defense before turning back to sort through the returned tapes. Billy rubbed the back of his neck, eyeing her nervously but didn't say anything.

Soon Max returned with two new tapes, The Texas Chainsaw Massacre and Poltergeist. Teddi nodded approvingly. "Tobe Hooper, awesome choice. You know, he uses real dead bodies in both of these. They said the Poltergeist set was totally haunted. Makes it like...a *million* times scarier." Teddi explained as she rang the movies up.

"*Awesome.*" Max grinned.

"How the fuck do you know all of this? You're like a bottomless pit of useless information." Billy grunted out, pulling his wallet out.

"I read, Billy. You should try it sometime. Five bucks," she held out her hand. Billy glared at her and slapped the bills into her palm. "Hope you like 'em, Max! They're due back Thursday. See you at the pool tomorrow, Hargrove." Max smiled at Teddi and happily ran out of the store while Billy stuck another cigarette between his lips.

He turned to leave, calling "See ya, *weird girl.*" over his shoulder before flipping Teddi off and stomping out once again.

Eventually Keith came back and reluctantly handed the bike over to Lucas and Dustin after they turned in their tickets. When he told Teddi she could leave early for the night, she practically jumped the counter. She grabbed her coat and bag and rushed outside, hissing as the cold air hit her bare legs. *Summer can't come fast enough*, she thought as she rushed over to her car and got in, cranking up the heat. It was late, and Teddi was hoping that would mean her parents

would be asleep by the time she got home.

Things had never been *great* between her and her parents. It had been the worst when she was little. Once her dad started making good money things eased up because he was never home, and she didn't care very much if her mother ignored her or not. But now that money was thin Teddi could sense the storm coming. So to avoid it she tried her best to stay out of the house as often as possible.

Unfortunately for her, she noticed the lights were still on in the living room once she pulled into the driveway. She let out a heavy sigh, trudging in and hanging her coat up by the door. Her dad was asleep in the recliner with a beer bottle sitting between his legs. Her mother was nowhere to be seen.

Teddi grabbed the bottle and shut the TV off before gently shaking his shoulder. "Dad, wake up. It's almost midnight."

He groaned, blinking up at her and pulling away harshly. "Get the fuck off me," he muttered before looking around and frowning. "Where have you been all day?"

"Work, dad."

He scoffed. "Right, *work*. Laying out by the pool and playing video games all day."

Teddi rolled her eyes. She didn't want to argue. She wanted to shower and get in bed. If anything she was surprised he remembered where she worked. That was more than she ever expected from him.

"Don't you fucking roll your eyes at me. Should you even be awake this late on a school night?"

Teddi headed down the hall. "It's Christmas break," She said simply before shutting her bedroom door. Teddi pulled off her boots, tossing them into her closet before plopping down on her bed. "Five more months," she reminded herself quietly. "*Five more months*." Once May rolled around she would graduate high school and finally be free of her parents. She didn't know in what capacity yet, but she didn't really care. Even if it meant sticking in Hawkins but living on her

own. She just wanted *out*.

Once the living room light shut off and she heard her parent's bedroom door shut, she grabbed clean pajamas and headed for the shower. The water was near scalding, but it did wonders to relieve her tense muscles. Unfortunately she found herself thinking about Billy.

Tomorrow she would be helping him teach one of the swim classes. Or watching and learning as he had put it. She couldn't really picture him teaching little kids much of anything. Maybe how to smoke and swear at their parents, but definitely not swimming. He was too gruff. When he was up in that lifeguard seat he reigned with near terror. Just the day before he had made a six year old cry after he had called him a shitbird for splashing too much. At least she would be there to hopefully provide a more gentle touch to the lesson.

Things between her and Billy were...weird. One minute they were bickering, the next they pretended the other didn't exist, then they would both be huddled together laughing at this one dad who liked to strut around in a speedo and hit on moms while his kid was in the pool. And this was just over the span of three days.

Teddi sighed loudly and willed herself to think of anything else. Soon Christmas break would be over and school would start back up at least. She could go back to being a friendly acquaintance to the kids in her classes and she'd get invited to parties on the weekend. Not that she'd go, but being invited was nice. And hopefully soon the months would fly by, she'd get accepted into a college and she could get far, far away from Hawkins. But until then she'd have to deal with Billy. Without killing him.

4. Chapter 4

A/N: Y'all have NO idea how amazing it is to get comments telling me that you like how I write Billy. I've been so worried that I wouldn't do him justice. And thank you for all the comments in general! I'm so so glad you all like reading this as much as I like writing it!

"Alright guys, let's- hey! Warren, what'd I tell you? You pick your nose one more time and you're mom's gonna be teaching you to swim out at the quarry!" Billy snapped, pointing to a guilty looking six year old boy. Billy had his class lined up at the edge of the shallow end of the pool. Teddi watched in awe as they each hung on his every word. Trying to keep the little ones under control at the Arcade had been like herding cats for her. Now she almost wanted to offer Billy a job there.

"Didn't a kid die out there?" Warren asked, his eyes wide.

"Not my problem." Billy said casually. Warren gulped loudly, folding his hands behind his back obediently.

Teddi scoffed. "You are the *worst*, Hargrove."

Billy grinned at her. "You got no idea, baby." Teddi rolled her eyes.

A girl that was standing at the end of the line and closest to Billy raised her hand. "Billy?" he turned to the girl, his eyebrows raised. The girl looked up at Teddi with a suspicious look. "Who is *she*?"

"This is Teddi. She's gonna be helping me keep you little monsters under control."

"Is she your girlfriend?" the girl interrupted. Teddi's nose scrunched up as she shook her head wildly.

"Aw, come on, Sophia. You know you're my girl." Billy said with a wink and a smile that Teddi was sure drove all the girls at school crazy. Sophia gave Teddi a proud smile, and Teddi had to resist rolling her eyes.

"Are you flirting with a six year old?"

"Jealous, Larsson?" *now* Teddi rolled her eyes. Billy snickered, turning back to the kids and blowing his whistle. "Alright, how about we show her what you guys can do? Everyone get into formation," Teddi watched with a near chill up her spine as each of the kids held their hands into the air almost simultaneously, prepared to dive as if they'd done it a million times. "On three!" he said, counting to three and blowing his whistle.

All seven of the kids dove down into the water, quickly returning to the surface and doggy paddling their way to the edge of the pool. "Good job guys! Now backstroke!"

Teddi looked between the group of kids in the pool and back to Billy, blinking rapidly. "*How* did you do this? They're practically olympic divers!" this was one of those moments where Billy almost looked like a different person. He wasn't angry. He looked almost proud as he watched his class gracefully swim back and forth in the water.

He only shrugged. "They're like dogs. They're easy to train." and just like that, cute but dickly Billy was back.

Teddi shook her head. "Well, it's super impressive."

Billy cast her a quick glance, an amused smirk on his lips. "Was that a compliment? You goin' soft on me, weird girl?"

Teddi crossed her arms, tilting her head to the side and smiling at him. "I think you're the one going soft, Billy. I think you might actually *like* those kids."

There was a very subtle shift in the smirk on Billy's face, but Teddi caught it. There was a mischievous glint in his eyes that made her wish she'd kept her mouth shut for once. "You think so?" he asked coolly, his eyes flickering quickly towards the pool.

Teddi pointed a finger at him. "Don't you dare, Hargrove." she warned. Billy stepped closer to her, her finger meeting the center of his chest.

"I don't think I know what you're talking about..." he said, matching

her steps as she tried to back away from him. Before Teddi could say anything more, Billy picked her up and tossed her into the pool as if she weighed as much as one of the six year olds in his class. She let out a scream before she hit the water, her mouth immediately filling with water. She kicked off of the bottom of the pool and emerged from the water, coughing almost violently and was immediately met with Billy watching her with a devilish grin.

Teddi coughed and sputtered, paddling over to the edge of the pool and glaring up at him. "You are so lucky there are children present." she snapped.

"Y'know, you should really watch that mouth, Teddi. It sure does get you into trouble," he teased before blowing his whistle and dismissing his students. Teddi pulled herself out of the pool, slapping Billy's hand away when he offered to help her up. "You sure can't take a joke can you, Larsson?"

Teddi looked at him coolly before letting out a shaky breath. "Sometimes I think I actually hate you, Billy."

He only rolled his eyes. "Join the club, babe. You should dry off. It's a cold one out there." he said evenly before walking off. Teddi glared at the back of his head before stomping off to the locker room. She *hated* that he could so easily get a rise out of her. She couldn't stop huffing while she showered and changed back into her clothes. Her hair was still damp, but it was as dry as she was going to be able to get it. *Thanks a lot asshole*, she thought bitterly.

She stomped back out of the locker room, her boots thumping against the concrete. Thankfully Billy was nowhere to be seen, only Heather. "Teddi!" She called waving her over to where she sat in the lifeguard's chair. Teddi bit back another huff and walked over. "Are you busy this weekend?" she asked.

Teddi raised an eyebrow. "...Why?"

"There's this Christmas party! You know that guy David in our English class? His parents are going out of town for the weekend for some work conference thing. It's on Friday, you should totally come!"

Teddi's nose scrunched up. "I don't know, Heather..."

"What's the matter, Larsson?" Teddi's jaw clenched as Billy sauntered up behind her, leaning against the lifeguard chair. "Do you even know how to have fun?" he had this challenging look in his eye that made Teddi want to punch him. She knew that he was trying to bait her and yet she was falling for it anyways.

"You know what? Sure, I'll be there. I'll see you tomorrow, Heather." she said with a wave and ignoring Billy completely. She threw her middle finger up over her shoulder, knowing Billy was smirking after her. She let out a loud huff when she heard him chuckle.

Teddi was emptying quarters from each of the games in the arcade, still irritated from the events at the pool. She could practically feel a cold coming from walking around in the snow with wet hair. If she didn't need the money so badly she would've quit. It definitely wasn't really worth having to put up with Billy and his confusing behavior. And now she was stuck having to go to some party.

She supposed that she didn't *have* to go. She could make something up about Keith not giving her the night off. Even though she knew he definitely knew that he would. She knew that her life was truly pathetic when even *Keith* was telling her she needed to get out more. But she felt like she had something to prove to Billy. He didn't *know* her. She could totally have fun...or at least she thought. With what little free time she gave herself she didn't do much. Not since she'd moved to Hawkins at least. There was this spot by the lake she liked to drive to and read...okay, so maybe Billy actually had a point.

Teddi huffed, shoving the door to the coin slot shut loudly. She *hated* that he was right. "Uh...you okay, Teddi?" she looked up to see Max looking at her with an amused expression.

"What? Yes. No...yes. Is Billy always so..."

"Awful?" Max finished for her. Teddi only sighed. "Pretty much. I mean, he has his moments lately but even then he's still sort of..." she took a moment to think of the right words.

"A complete dick?" Teddi asked. Max laughed and nodded. "You're a

saint for putting up with him, Max. I might actually kill him pretty soon."

Max didn't say anything for a moment before shrugging. "...He's not so bad. Things could be worse. He's getting better. *Kinda*." Teddi gave her a disbelieving look, but didn't push the subject.

"Uh huh. So how'd you like those movies?" she asked, kneeling down in front of the next machine and making quick work of the screws keeping the coin slot's door shut.

"Oh, they were *totally awesome*," Max grinned. "I was gonna have El over for a sleepover this weekend. You want to come over and bring some new tapes? She'll *freak*. And plus it'll get Billy off our backs."

Teddi couldn't help but smile. Max was sort of like the little sister she had always wanted. They both liked all the same things, and Max actually thought she was *cool*. "I'd love to Max, but I have this stupid party to go to."

Max looked more surprised than disappointed. "*You're* going to a party?"

"Trust me, no one's more surprised than I am. Your big, dumb, stupid brother talked me into it. What about the next weekend? School'll be back and I won't have to work as much." she offered.

"Yeah, sure...you're not gonna start dating Billy are you?" Max asked. Teddi almost knocked over her coin bucket. She whipped her head over to look at Max incredulously.

"*What?*"

"You're going to a party with him." Max said with her arms crossed.

"I'm not going *with* him," she scoffed. "Max, Billy is an *asshole*." Teddi argued.

"Yeah, and plenty of girls still go out with him."

Teddi shook her head wildly, locking the machine's door shut and picking the coin bucket up. "No way. Look, he's cute and all. But

that's totally not gonna make me *date* him. I can barely even stand being in the same room as him." she nearly shuddered at the thought.

Max opened her mouth to speak, but a voice that came from behind Teddi cut her off. "You think I'm cute, Larsson?" Teddi jumped at the sound of Billy's voice. Her eyes widened as she turned to face him. He was leaning against one of the games, smirking at her.

"Are you stalking me, Hargrove?" she said, grateful she was able to recover quickly from the embarrassment.

"Don't you wish. I'm here to pick up Max."

Max rolled her eyes. "I told you I didn't need a ride."

"Yeah, well, your mom doesn't trust that you'll come home on your own." he said, his voice had just a bit of bite in it. He looked back at Teddi. "Do you hang out with anyone your age, Teddi? Or do you just hang around lame ass kids all day?"

Teddi crossed her arms. "I could say the same for you. You're either harassing me or teaching six year olds to swim. What was it you were saying the other night? You're swimming in pussy?"

Billy's smirk just barely twitched, but Teddi noticed. It felt so satisfying whenever she could get a jab in on her end. It was crazy to her that just a few days ago Teddi hadn't even known Billy's *name*, and now he was practically the bane of her existence. "You know, it kinda sounds like *you're* the one that's obsessed with *me*, Ted."

"Oh my *god* you two are annoying," Max huffed loudly. She looked between the two of them as they shot dirty looks at each other. "Can we go home now before I barf?" she pulled on Billy's arm. He jerked his arm away, but said nothing. "I'll see you tomorrow, Teddi." Max rolled her eyes and headed outside without him. For a moment Teddi thought they would be there all night. Neither would budge like it was some sort of sign of weakness. She almost felt like she was in some old western standoff.

But Billy was the first to crack. He let out a humorless chuckle, pushing off of the game and shooting one more smirk her way before

sauntering outside. Teddi let out a breath she didn't realize she'd been holding in. "Boy," Teddi jumped at the sound of Keith's voice beside her. "That was some Gone With the Wind tension." he said, crossing his arms as he and Teddi both watched Billy head back to his Camaro and drive off.

"...Don't think just because you're my boss that I won't shank you with my screw driver."

5. Chapter 5

It was Teddi's first day off from the pool. She still had her shift later on at the arcade and video store, but unfortunately not much else to do to pass the time. Her dad was off at work, so she could technically spend her day at home, but Teddi didn't really feel like awkwardly sitting around the house while she and her mother tried to avoid each other.

Instead she decided to drive into town. There was this coffee shop in the town square that kids from school liked to hang out at when there wasn't much else to do. She figured since her usual spot at the lake would be a little too cold to sit at and read, she'd settle for sitting in the corner of the shop with some hot chocolate and her book. There were a few kids she recognized. She said her hellos and settled in with her *very* well loved copy of *The Fellowship of the Ring* and walkman. There was this mixtape that she had made for herself (she was well aware that that was pathetic) of a few of her favorite songs; the first being *Don't You Want Me* by the Human League.

It may not have looked like it to anyone else, but Teddi loved having time off. It was rare, she made sure of that, but she relished the time she had to shut out the rest of the world and disappear to one where the only problems were magical rings, dragons and orcs. Maybe it was childish of her. She didn't really care. She was more than happy to trade in her life for the few moments of fantasy.

But of course, all good things must come to an end. Teddi's headphones were yanked from her head. "*What the hell?*" she snapped. She looked up at the culprit, groaning loudly and throwing her head back once her eyes landed on Billy, who was holding her headphones up with a wide grin. "*Leave me alone, Hargrove.*" she moaned, pressing the palms of her hands to her eyes.

"Now that's not very nice. Whatcha listening to?" he held up her headphones to her ears, his nose scrunching up in disapproval. "Figures you have shitty taste in music. Listening to this and thinking about me, Teddi?" he asked with a smug look.

"If I ever think about you it's about how badly I wish I could punch

you in the head." she said, snatching her headphones back.

"Someone's got her panties in a twist," He snickered. Teddi let out an exasperated sigh as he grabbed the seat across from her, turned it around and straddled it. "You working later tonight?"

"What the hell do you care?"

He rolled his eyes. "You know, if you weren't such a bitch you wouldn't have to hang out by yourself all the time."

"That's rich coming from you. The only person that'll hang out around you is Tommy H, and everyone knows he's only friends with you because you're a new, shiny, popular kid," she snapped. Billy's jaw clenched. Instead of poking him further and dealing with his attitude, she sighed. "Yes, I'm working later."

This seemed to appease him, thankfully. "I need a favor."

Teddi laughed. "*You* want a favor from *me*? *No way.*"

Billy rolled his eyes and leaned in closer. "You don't even know what it is yet," he argued. Teddi only crossed her arms. "My dad and Susan are making me watch Max tonight. But I have a date, and I'd much rather be in the backseat of my car with Cheryl Burns than watching the twerp."

Teddi scoffed. "*Cheryl Burns?*"

"What's wrong with Cheryl Burns?"

"Didn't she have an affair with the gym teacher?"

"*Allegedly.*"

Teddi rolled her eyes. "So I guess you want me to keep an eye on Max while you bang Cheryl Burns?" Billy nodded. Teddi thought for a moment. That wouldn't be a big deal for her. Watching Max and her friends practically came with her job anyways. But this was an opportunity to finally mess with Billy, and she wasn't going to pass it up. "...What's in it for me?"

Billy didn't bother to hide how annoyed he was. "What do you *mean* what's in it for you? What do you want?"

Teddi smiled sweetly, leaning in close to Billy. "I was thinking you and I could go to that Christmas party together? Maybe you could take me for a ride in that Camaro of yours?" she asked, batting her eyelashes. For once, Billy was actually speechless. His surprised expression morphed into a devilish grin, and Teddi let out a loud laugh. "I'm *totally* kidding. God, can you imagine?" she said waving a hand at him.

Billy only glared at her. This girl drove him crazy. One second she's *complimenting* him, the next she's telling him he's satan incarnate. Now she was *pretending* to flirt with him? *Chicks, man*, he thought bitterly. He reached forward and snatched the book Teddi was holding away, ignoring her protests. He turned it over in his hands, studying the cover. "Jesus Christ, how old is this thing? It's falling apart. And *Lord of the Rings*? You really are a geek, aren't you, weird girl?"

"It's a *classic*," she said before snatching the book back. "And it's my favorite. Have you ever even read a book before?" she asked with narrowed eyes.

Billy thought for a moment. "...I read that one Stephen King book about the clown when I was a kid. You know, the one where the kids have a gang bang down in the clown sewer?" He was surprised when Teddi actually laughed. A genuine laugh.

"That's sure one way to describe it. Look, I'll watch Max, okay? Happy?"

"Oh, I'll be a lot happier after a night with Cheryl," he grinned. Teddi rolled her eyes. "I'll drop her off at eight. Later, Larsson." and with that he left, lighting a cigarette as he went. Teddi sighed. She really hoped that this wouldn't lead to her becoming his wingman or something. She couldn't think of anything she'd want less than helping Billy Hargrove get laid.

Billy had assured Susan about twenty times that he was going to stay at the arcade with Max that night. Ever since the night Max had run

off with that Sinclair kid, Susan had become a complete pain in Billy's ass. Now it was somehow *his* job to take care of her and make sure she didn't get into trouble. Max was *his* responsibility and not his dad or Susan's. To say it was causing him to resent Max was an understatement.

He didn't really *mind* Max if he was honest. She was pretty funny, and she wasn't annoying like other girls her age. There was a part of Billy that thought if things were different he would probably be okay with having Max as a step sister. Maybe if his dad wasn't in the picture. Maybe one day when Billy got out of that shitty house his dad had moved them into things could be different. Maybe he wouldn't be so *angry* all the damn time.

But tonight he'd be free. At least for a few hours. Teddi had agreed to cover for him with Max, and he'd finally get to bag Cheryl Burns, who had been giving him the run around since he moved to Hawkins. Max didn't really care, she was just happy to be out of the house. He definitely couldn't blame her. "I'm picking you up at *ten*, Max. Your ass better be outside waiting for me. I'm don't wanna have to listen to Susan bitch at me that we missed curfew because of you."

Max rolled her eyes. "Sure thing *your majesty*," she muttered. Billy shot her a glare, but didn't say anything. "I can't believe you got Teddi to cover for you. She can't stand you."

"She doesn't even know me." he spat defensively. He knew he got on Teddi's nerves sure, but Jesus, he didn't think she actually *hated* him.

"Do you even hear how you sound when you speak to people? I can't believe she hasn't punched you yet." Max said with a small laugh. Billy didn't respond. He only gripped the steering wheel tightly. Couldn't anyone tell that he was *trying*? What was it going to take? Sacrificing himself to save a box full of puppies from an oncoming train or something? He scoffed.

Billy and Max pulled into the parking lot of the Palace Arcade and went inside. It seemed busier than usual. Or more chaotic at least. Billy did a quick sweep of the place, but couldn't find Teddi. "Well where the fuck is she?" he asked, looking over towards the video store. Still no sign of her white blonde hair.

Max was looking around as well, a frown appearing on her face when she couldn't spot Teddi either. "I don't know...maybe she's on her break or something? Just get out of here, Billy. I'll find Teddi." she said, waving him away.

Billy spotted Keith behind the prize counter. He brushed past Max and headed over. "Hey, where's Teddi? She told me she'd be in tonight."

Keith actually rolled his eyes at him. "Sorry, lover boy, she's not here. She called a couple hours ago and said something came up. Notice the wild animals frothing at the mouth. She's the only one that can keep them under control." he said, motioning to all the kids running around the small arcade.

Billy's jaw clenched. Was Teddi fucking with him? Telling him she'd help and then ditching him at the last minute as some sort of joke? He stomped back over to Max, jabbing a finger at her. "Remember what I said. *Ten*. Don't do anything stupid." he didn't give her time to answer. He shoved the door open, storming out to his car and speeding away.

He tried to put it out of his mind once he picked up Cheryl. He had been looking forward to this for *months*. He wasn't going to let Teddi trying to get back at him for throwing her into the pool (or *whatever* she was obviously pissed at him for) or his dad finding out he had ditched Max at the arcade ruin his night.

But the thing was...Cheryl was *boring*. Maybe if he had been back home in California he wouldn't have minded. Everything had seemed more exciting there. But now, here in Hawkins, with Cheryl not even attempting to *pretend* they were on a real date (even though he had taken her out to his spot at the lake since they both knew *why* they were going out) and immediately crawling into the backseat of his car, wagging one of her long, painted nails at him suggestively, Billy found himself just very *bored*. Was this it? If Cheryl Burns was the end all be all of the girls at his school, what did he really have to look forward to?

It just made him hate Hawkins even more.

He ended up taking Cheryl home early. He told her he'd call (he wouldn't) and he drove back to the arcade to sit in the parking lot until ten rolled around. He felt like the biggest loser in town.

Billy wondered briefly what must have come up with Teddi. What could have possibly happened to make Teddi Larsson, the most reliable person he'd probably *ever* met, skip out on work. Whatever it was, it gave him a bad feeling. The air felt thick around him and he had that anxious feeling in his chest that he got whenever his dad got pissed at him.

He let out a huff and lit a cigarette. Whatever it was, she'd be getting an ear full from him the next time he saw her. *No one* stood up Billy Hargrove. If she wanted him to be the bad guy, he was more than happy to play the role.

Flicking his half finished cigarette out the window with an annoyed sigh, Billy pressed his hand down on the horn, deciding he had had enough of waiting around for Max. He saw her face appear in the window, rolling her eyes once she spotted Billy and trudging out to the car.

"You said *ten*," she argued as she slid into the passenger's seat.

"*I changed my mind*," he snapped. Max only crossed her arms. That little part of him felt bad for dragging her away and making her go back home. But that little part was quickly snuffed out by the bigger, angier part of him. That side always won. Whether he wanted it to or not. He almost wondered when it would take control completely. He'd be lying if he said it didn't scare him a little.

A/N: There's some drama coming up before the party! And some drama after the party...just so much drama.

6. Chapter 6

A/N: I've had a few people asking if I'll be including the supernatural aspects of the show, and I will be! This takes place just after season 2 and will include the events of the third season! I'll also be including more character cameos. We'll meet Joyce in this chapter, and she and Hopper will make a few appearances throughout. Steve will also start to get peppered in and become a big part of the story! I've also had a few concerns about Teddi's dad, and I just want y'all to know that while he's an important part of Teddi's story (and the future plot) it won't be a focal point or even a major part of her relationship with Billy. But I want to thank you all for the comments! It means so much and I'm so glad you guys are loving this so far! I'm also open to more prompts/drabbles/etc for Billy and Teddi and exploring their relationship more so my inbox over on my hunnywrites tumblr is always open!

Hawkins was a blur. Teddi felt like she was on some sort of alternate dimension. Her head hadn't stopped hurting since the night before and now everything just seemed...*hazy*. Slow. *Weird*. She was also well aware that she was the only person in town wearing sunglasses. She hoped that no one would really notice that the gloomy, cold, winter afternoon just seemed a little too much for her to handle. She'd done her best to cover up the giant bruise on her left eye with makeup, but it was still too noticeable for her liking.

Teddi was *embarrassed*. She knew she shouldn't be. Her dad was a jerk and that was all. But still, she felt like if anyone saw her black eye and put the pieces together they would judge *her* for it. After leaving the coffee shop the day before she had gone home to change for work, and her father had come home early. They had gotten into an argument over how often she was out. He blamed her for leaving her "poor mother" home alone all day and night. Teddi had been dumb enough to try and argue back, and now she had a lovely shiner to remind her of just how bad an idea that was.

At first she had been worried she'd had a concussion. He had hit her twice. A hit across her face with the back of his hand as punishment for talking back that had made her ears ring, and then another hit

directly to her eye for good measure. She still remembered how shocked she had been after it happened. It had been a *long* time since he had ever laid a hand on her. It happened all the time when she was younger. Teddi had always been too little to really understand that the way her father taught her lessons was far from okay. Around the time she entered middle school and she was beginning to realize all of the other kids didn't have parents that hit them, Teddi's dad had gotten a big promotion at his construction job. He'd started making really good money then and Teddi stopped existing for the most part. After that the abuse mostly just been verbal. All bark and no bite. But with the added stress of being completely broke and stuck in a shitty job that he hated, Teddi assumed this was just an excuse to let some of his frustration out like it had been when she was a kid.

She didn't really know if her mom had any idea that it had happened. Teddi had only seen her once that morning and that had been it. Her dad had stormed off after. Teddi assumed he was off to some bar to drink his stress away. But to avoid pissing him off any more than she already had she called Keith and told him she couldn't come in. He had been understanding of course. It was the first time she'd called out since she'd been hired. And it was probably for the best anyways, considering how she looked.

There had always been that voice in her head telling her that she should tell *someone* about her home life. But over time she had convinced herself that it would only bring more trouble. What if she told someone and they didn't believe her? What if they told her father? Eventually she had gotten into her habits of avoiding her parents and it hadn't been much of an issue all too often. And what was the point now? She was almost out of the house, and this was probably a one off occasion. So she would just stick it out.

Teddi felt really awful about ditching Max and Billy though. She never broke a promise. *Ever*. Now she would have to come up with some sort of an excuse for when Billy no doubt confronted her about it. She just prayed that his "date" with Cheryl Burns had gone well so he would be in somewhat of a good mood.

Teddi walked into Melvald's drug store and pushed her glasses further up her nose. There weren't many people around, but

thankfully they were all too busy with whatever they were doing to pay much attention to her. She grabbed a bottle of aspirin and headed to the counter where Joyce Byers was waiting. Teddi had only spoken to Joyce a handful of times when she would come to the arcade to pick Will up, but she was probably one of the sweetest people Teddi had ever met. She was a little overprotective of Will, but from the little Teddi had heard of Will's disappearance about a year ago she couldn't really blame Joyce for being that way.

"Hey Teddi," Joyce greeted her warmly. Joyce looked from Teddi to the large windows and out to the slightly overcast day. She quirked an eyebrow and smiled. "Bright out today?"

Teddi hesitated a moment before letting out a nervous laugh and slowly taking off her glasses. "No. I uh had a little accident getting out of my van yesterday. The driveway was like *super* icy and I slipped. Looks great, right?" she joked, motioning to her eye.

Joyce made a face. "Oh *jeez*. Are you okay, hun?"

"Pffft, totally. My ego's more bruised than the rest of me." that wasn't completely a lie either. Joyce gave Teddi a slightly uneasy look.

"Well, alright. You be more careful next time though, huh?"

Teddi nodded. "Oh I definitely will. Um, I'll see you at the arcade later I guess? I should probably go. My shift starts soon."

"Oh! Sure, sure," Joyce handed Teddi her bag. "Yeah, I'm picking up the kids for movie night at our place. I hope you feel better, hun."

"Thanks, Ms. Byers. Later!" she nearly ran outside and shoved her glasses back on. Teddi was headed straight for her van when she heard the sound of a door slamming.

"*Larsson!*" the tone in Billy's voice made the hairs on the back of her neck stand on end. She turned to face him, fidgeting with her glasses awkwardly and offered him a small smile.

"Hey, Billy. Look I'm so-"

"Where the *fuck* were you last night?" he seethed, stomping over to

her. She took a step back from him in shock. She expected him to be angry, but not *this* angry.

"Something came up..." she offered weakly.

Billy raised his eyebrows, his head tilting to the side. "Oh yeah? Like what? Do you have *any* idea how much shit I would've been in without you? If Max had run off?" so that's what it was. He might have gotten in trouble, and he was taking it out on her. "I'm *waiting*, Larsson." he snapped, taking a step closer to her.

Teddi's anger outweighed anything else she was feeling. She wasn't in the mood to deal with one of Billy's tantrums when she had *actual* problems to deal with. "Leave me the fuck alone, Billy." she bit out, turning to walk away.

He grabbed her arm, spinning her back around. "Was this some kind of a *joke*?" he asked. "Trying to pull one over on me for throwing you in the pool? You want me to say *sorry*?"

Teddi jerked away from him and took a small step back. "I want you to go away! I want you to stop being so fucking *mean* for once! Jesus, what is *wrong* with you? The whole world doesn't revolve around you, Billy! I have shit going on in my life and I can't be at your beck and call!" They both stood there on the sidewalk, both still and glaring at each other. But while Billy was nearly standing over her in this menacing stance with his jaw clenched so tightly he felt like his teeth might shatter, Teddi was pulled away from him almost like a frightened child. Her arms were crossed against her chest like she was trying to shield herself from something. *From him.*

And it wasn't until that moment that Billy realized she was *scared* of him. She'd never been scared of him before. She'd always met him head on. That little, nicer part of Billy was screaming. Max was right, he was an *asshole*. His face softened a little, and he took a step back from her. He shoved his hands awkwardly in his pockets before fumbling to light a cigarette. Teddi let out a deep breath and adjusted her sunglasses. "Why are you wearing those?" he finally asked.

"It's bright out." she snapped.

Billy studied her quietly for a moment. It was a hunch. His own paranoia talking maybe. But between that bad feeling he'd had the night before and how absolutely *cliche* Teddi looked he couldn't help by wonder. Before he could give Teddi a chance to protest or smack his hands away, he reached forward to snatch her sunglasses off. He felt his stomach drop when he saw the large, nasty bruise on her eye. "Jesus, Ted, ...how'd you get that?"

Teddi wouldn't meet his eyes. Her bottom lip shook, and Billy watched as big, fat tears pooled in her eyes. He shifted uncomfortably. "I slipped on ice last night in my driveway. That's why I wasn't at work. I hit my head and I felt like *shit*." He had a feeling it was a lie, but he didn't push it. He'd made stupid excuses like that before after having to go to school with a busted lip or a black eye. That anxious feeling in his chest was back. Billy didn't know anything about her parents. He didn't know their names, or what they looked like. Max had made a comment that Teddi had moved to Hawkins after her dad had gotten laid off, and now he was working construction on some mall that was being built outside of town. Still, he never would have guessed that Teddi's parents might be *hurting* her.

But then the dam broke. Teddi broke out into tears, and Billy nearly recoiled from her. He nervously handed her her sunglasses back, holding up his hands in defense. "Christ, Teddi. Don't do that. *People are looking at us*." he begged.

"They're probably looking at us because you were *screaming* at me!" she argued, leaning against her van and slipping her glasses back on. "God, this is so *embarrassing*." she whimpered, nearly doubling over to hide.

Billy took a drag of his cigarette, unsure of what to do. He *hated* it when people cried. He looked up to see a few people glancing over in their direction. "What?! You've never seen someone cry before? Keep fucking walking!" he snapped.

Teddi only groaned. "Oh my *god*. You're making it *worse*," she moaned. "Look, I'm sorry okay? I should have left a message with Keith or something. And I'm sorry if you guys got in trouble or something-"

Billy shook his head, waving a hand at her. "Nothing happened...Max was just worried is all. I got sick of listening to her." he wasn't sure why he even said that.

"*Shit*. Is she mad at me too? I'll be in tonight if you wanna bring her over..."

"No one's *mad*, Larsson," she shot him a look. "Okay, so I was a *little* mad," he let out a loud sigh. "You just drive me up the fucking wall sometimes. I mean, I got to do shit to Cheryl Burns last night that you wouldn't *believe* and after all of that I was still pissed off that you ditched. Do you have any idea what that's like? How *frustrating* that is?"

"I think you might just be a little too full of yourself." Teddi sniffed.

Billy rolled his eyes. Now she was starting to sound like Max. "Look, are you gonna be alright? Do I need to...like, drive you home or something?"

Teddi looked a little shocked at his offer, but shook his head. "I'm not going home...but thanks, I'll be fine," Billy nodded, flicking the rest of his cigarette away. "Uh, can we maybe not tell anyone about this? Ever?"

"Who am I gonna tell? I only hang around you and six year olds, remember?" he asked, turning and walking back to his car.

Teddi sighed loudly, reaching under her glasses to wipe her eyes one last time before getting into her car. '*You just drive me up the fucking wall sometimes.*' that was rich coming from him. At least she had never screamed at him in front of the whole town. Okay, maybe not the *whole* town, but still.

She had a pretty good feeling now that Billy knew *something* was amiss. The way he had looked at her after he pulled her glasses off almost made her wonder if he could read her mind. He looked...*sympathetic* almost. Which was a really weird feeling. It bothered her more to wonder *why* he had seemed sympathetic. Billy didn't care about anything that didn't directly involve him.

If anything maybe this would lead to something good. Maybe this was a new side to Billy and he would back off a little...unlikely, but she could hope. Maybe she would be able to enjoy that Christmas party that was coming up in a few days without having to worry about him trying to pester her or snap at her or *whatever* he would do depending on his mood.

Teddi shook her head, deciding to shove all of this to the back of her mind and focus on getting to the arcade. She wouldn't be able to wear her sunglasses inside. So she would have to count on her lying skills and the bright, neon lighting inside to help disguise the truth. If it even came up. She wasn't really expecting for a bunch of preteens to be half as observant as Billy (as strange of a thought that that was to have). Especially when video games were involved.

Keith was already there when she arrived. He was stationed at his usual post behind the prize counter looking like he might actually die from boredom. Teddi smiled at him, pushing her sunglasses on top of her head. "Hey Keith, your saving grace is here." she joked.

"They're really at it today. An eight year old spit gum in my hair...man, what happened to your face?" he asked, making a face once he spotted her black eye.

Teddi's smile only faltered a little before she let out what she hoped to be a convincing laugh. "Oh yeah, this is why I couldn't come in last night. I ate shit on some ice. It's a great look, right?"

"I didn't know you were such a klutz." shockingly Keith's teasing didn't quite have the same charm that Billy's had.

"Me? Pfft. It's a miracle I'm still alive," she laughed nervously. "I'm gonna go put my stuff in my locker and I'll take over. No gum spitting eight year olds next door." she didn't give him a chance to answer. She slipped past him and into the door behind him that read 'employees only'. The break room was *incredibly* shitty. At least the one at the pool had a vending machine. This was just barely too big to call a closet. There was a single row of lockers crammed in the corner next to two games that Keith had been saying he'd get around to repairing, and a tiny fold out table and chair. Needless to say, Teddi preferred taking her breaks in her van.

She pulled a small zipper pouch out of her bag and picked out a compact. She touched up the makeup around her eye, grimacing at how noticeable the bruise still was. At least Keith had bought her story. Tossing the pouch back into her bag, she grabbed the painkillers she'd bought before her run in with Billy and dry swallowed two before tossing her bag into her locker.

She walked back out just in time to see Max, Lucas and Will walking in. "Hey guys!" she greeted. "Sorry about last night, Max. I had a little accident." she pointed to her eye.

Max only shrugged. "It's no big deal. I mean, Billy was super pissy, but I figured you were like...sick or something. Hey, you think you could help us pick out a movie? Everyone's supposed to be meeting us here. We're gonna hang out at Will's later."

Teddi was officially confused. Billy had told her that Max was worried last night when she didn't show. She shrugged it off. "Uh, yeah! Yeah, sure. Just come find me when you guys are ready. I have a few machines with sticky buttons that need fixing."

"*Please* tell me one of them is Galaga. I haven't been able to play in two weeks. My high score is in jeopardy, Teddi." Lucas said, folding his hands together as if he were begging her.

Teddi laughed. "Yeah, I'll take a look at it, okay? Can't have high scores in jeopardy. Later, little dudes." even though Teddi now had some new questions about Billy, the interaction left her feeling relieved. All that worrying about coming in to work was over nothing. Now she could actually *enjoy* her shift. Even though most of it would be wiping down machines from whatever gunk the kids of Hawkins seemed to always have on their hands.

7. Chapter 7

A/N: The Christmas party is finally here! We'll see a small appearance of Steve, a little more Cheryl and some seed are finally about to be planted in the Billy and Teddi garden. Enjoy!

"Warren, come on, buddy! Fingers out of your nose!" Teddi called down from her spot in the life guard's chair. He jumped, turning to look at Teddi with wide eyes. He hid his hands behind his back.

"Sorry, Teddi!"

Teddi couldn't help but let out a small laugh as she shook her head. Billy's class had ended around twenty minutes ago, and a few of the kids were still splashing around in the pool while they waited for their parents to pick them up. Thankfully they had all taken to Teddi pretty well. Even Sophia had decided she sort of liked Teddi after deciding there was no way she and Billy were dating with how often they bickered.

"That Brian kid keeps staring at you." Teddi rolled her eyes at the sound of Billy's voice. She looked down to see him leaning against her chair, sticking a piece of spearmint gum into his mouth in lieu of a cigarette. Teddi knew this already. Brian was in the same grade as Teddi and Billy. He was on the soccer team, and he was kind of an idiot. But he looked like Patrick Swayze, so all of the girls liked him.

"And what of it, Hargrove?" she asked in a bored tone. Billy crossed his arms, watching Brian from across the pool.

"And I think he might wanna ask you out, weird girl." she chose not to let him know how annoying she found it that he sounded so amused. Teddi was mostly just glad that there was no sign of awkwardness between them since that day outside of Melvald's. They were right back to their normal routine and she couldn't have felt more grateful.

Teddi thought about the idea of Brian asking her out for a moment before shaking her head. "Yeah...no thanks."

"Are you sure you're not a lesbian?"

Teddi rolled her eyes. "*I'm not a lesbian.*"

"Fine. So if Brian isn't your type then what is?" he huffed, turning to face her.

Teddi shrugged. "Rob Lowe's pretty hot."

"Oh, so you'll bang Rob Lowe, but not me?" the tops of his ears were getting red again like they usually did when he got annoyed.

"Anyone would bang Rob Lowe over you. And I won't sleep with *you* because you're an asshole. I'm fairly certain we've been over this. Besides, you don't even *like* me."

"You think I *like* any of the girls I hook up with?"

Teddi couldn't help but laugh. "Hargrove, that's one of the saddest things I've ever heard. And what do you care anyways? Shouldn't you be over there hitting on the moms?" Billy only scoffed. "And why are you suddenly so interested in my love life anyways?"

"I'm just thinking if you get laid maybe you'll stop being so uptight."

Tedd rolled her eyes. "God, you're a pig, you know that?"

Billy completely ignored the comment. "What, you don't want a date for the party this weekend?"

"Do *you* have a date to the party?"

He shrugged. "I might take Cheryl." he didn't really *want* to take Cheryl. He was pretty sure that a blow up doll had more personality. But she was a sure thing, so who was he to pass that up? He felt a wave of satisfaction when he noticed how annoyed Teddi looked.

But she didn't say anything. "I'm not really looking to date. Guys our age are way too needy and stupid." and on top of it all even if she *wanted* to date she didn't have the time for it. There was also the added frustration of her home life and the fact that she would have to be insane to try and drag some guy into that on top of the fact that

she was planning on leaving Hawkins in the next few months.

"Mr. Myers more your speed?" he asked with a grin, nodding over to where Mr. Myers was pacing up and down the length of the pool in his speedo. Teddi and Billy broke out into a fit of snickers as they watched him try to catch the attention of all the women lounging poolside.

"No, I'll definitely pass. I'm just not interested in dating I guess. Maybe in college or something." She said with a shrug.

Billy pushed off of the chair and shook his head. "Whatever you say, weird girl. It's my turn up in the seat. Freddy said you can head off to the arcade."

"Awesome." Teddi hopped down from the chair and rushed off to the locker room to change. She was back out of the locker room in record time and almost outside when Brian stopped her.

"Teddi, hey. How's it going?" Teddi almost felt horrified when she realized that Billy had apparently been completely onto something.

"Uh, it's good. Just got off my shift so I'm off to the arcade..." she was trying to be as polite as possible, but Teddi did *not* want to have this conversation.

"Right, sorry. I just wanted to ask, uh, are you going to that party this weekend at David's?" he scratched the back of his neck awkwardly.

"Yeah. Heather invited me a few days ago. I mean, I'm pretty sure I can go at least." she should have just lied and said she had to work.

"Cool, cool. Uh, I was wondering if maybe you wanted to go with me? I could pick you up at the arcade?" the thing was that Teddi was bad at saying no. Well, she was good at it when it came to Billy at least. And even though she really, really didn't want to go to the party with a date, it was a little too hard to look at Brian's dumb, pretty face and tell him she wasn't interested.

"Um...sure, alright. I get off at eight, okay?"

"Dope...well, later then." he gave an awkward wave and walked off.

Teddi looked over to where Billy was sitting. He was grinning at her from ear to ear. Teddi shot him a mocking look and flipped him off before she ducked outside and rushed over to her van. How did she keep digging herself into holes like this? Before she could stop herself she got this horrifying image of going on double dates with Brian, Billy and Cheryl. She groaned and dropped her head down onto her steering wheel. God she hated Hawkins.

It was Friday, the night that she had been dreading the entire week. She could barely focus on her work. The kids in the arcade could have staged a full mutiny against Keith and she wouldn't have realized it was happening. She felt stupid for being so nervous. It was just a *party*. Teddi had gone to *plenty* of parties back when she lived in New York. But then things had been different then. There hadn't been the pressure of money and responsibility that she had now among other things.

The fact that she had a date wasn't making things any better. She would be stupid to say she wasn't attracted to Brian. He wasn't exactly her type, sure, but still he had one of those smiles that made you forget what it was you were talking about.

Teddi hadn't really had a good idea of what to wear either. It was just a house party, but the added date aspect made her want to put a little more effort into it. She ended up choosing a black, off the shoulder top with a plaid mini she had just bought not too long ago. If she paired it with the same pair of boots she could usually be found in she would look nice, but not like she had tried too hard. She ended up changing out of her work uniform in the arcade's break room and deciding to hang out behind the prize counter to wait for Brian.

"Wow, you actually look like a *girl*." Keith had said once he saw her.

"...Thank you, Keith." she sighed.

"You got a hot date?"

"Brian's picking me up for that Christmas party. You know, the one that you said you'd rather light yourself on fire rather than go to?" he wasn't wrong to think that way either. Teddi kinda wished she could do the same right about now.

"Brian Jean? How'd you swing that?"

Teddi let out a heavy sigh. "I wish I knew." it wasn't like she was ugly or anything. The idea of a boy asking her out wasn't so completely insane. She was no Nancy Wheeler or Cheryl Burns, sure, but Teddi just kept to herself mostly. She was sure that if Brian hadn't had a little brother that was in Billy's class at the pool he never would have known that she existed. At least now she could technically partially blame Billy. That made her feel a little bit better.

"Look at him," Keith said as Brian walked into the arcade. "He's like...prince charming. You have got to tell me how this party went tomorrow."

Teddi looked over at Keith with an amused grin. "I thought you didn't want to go?"

"I don't. But I still wanna know what happens." he gave her a pointed look as he disappeared off into the arcade as Brian walked up to the prize counter.

He flashed Teddi one of those dazzling smiles of his. "Hey. Man, you look totally hot."

Teddi let out a nervous laugh. "Oh, thanks. I mean I'll freeze my ass off, but at least I'll look good, right?" she joked. She grabbed her coat, smiling when Brian helped her put it on and followed him out to his car. He even opened the car door for her too. Teddi had to admit that she was impressed. Although with spending so much time around Billy lately she'd probably find anything halfway nice was impressive.

It was a short ride to the party. Brian made polite small talk with her during the drive. As dumb as he was, Brian was a fairly easy guy to talk to. She could feel her anxiety about all of it fade a little bit the more they spoke. Maybe having a date wouldn't be so bad.

When they got to David's house there were a few dozen cars already parked in the lawn. Teddi wasn't sure when exactly the party had started, but she was sure that by now it had turned into a rager. The Christmas lights that had been hanging from the roof were now hanging halfway off and strung down the driveway. There was a light

up Santa that was face down in the lawn, and three of his reindeers were nowhere in sight. Three guys that Teddi recognized from the football team were all passed out in the driveway with beers clutched tightly in their hands.

"Wow, guess we missed out on some fun, huh?" she asked with a small laugh as they weaved their way up towards the front door. Brian opened it and stepped aside to let her in. Jingle Bells was playing far too loudly inside.

"Oh don't worry, dude. I'm sure we can catch up," he said reassuringly. "You want some punch or something?" Teddi nodded, peeling off her coat and tossing it into the pile that sat by the front door. She didn't envy David for having to clean all of this up tomorrow. I looked like a tornado had passed through his living room.

Brian gave Teddi a thumbs up and disappeared into the crowd. This was the part that she hated most about parties. The awkward waiting around. She also didn't really recognize anyone there. There wasn't any sign of Heather so far. She'd spotted a quick flash of Steve Harrington when she had walked in, but he had quickly disappeared into the sea of people. She and Steve were pretty good friends. They'd met through Max and her friends. But Teddi hadn't seen too much of him during Christmas break since Steve was working with his dad for a little extra cash. Eventually Teddi guessed that no one would really notice her standing there. They were all far too wrapped up in whatever they were doing to notice. But she still felt super exposed somehow. And besides, it felt like Brian was taking a *long* time.

"Well Goddamn, Larsson. You clean up nice," Teddi sighed loudly and turned to face Billy. She had to admit, he looked good. His leather jacket hung over a black button up shirt that was of course unbuttoned low on his chest. The same necklace he always wore dangled against his bare skin, and she was pretty sure his jeans were a full three sizes too small. She could also smell his cologne from where she stood. "How come you don't dress like this for me?"

"Shouldn't you be balls deep in Cheryl Burns right about now?" she asked, rolling her eyes. Teddi was a little surprised that she hadn't spotted Cheryl yet. She was sure that Cheryl and Billy would've been

attached at the hips all night.

Billy flashed a devilish grin at her. "That what you think about in your free time, Teddi? Me balls deep in other girls?" Teddi scoffed. Billy smirked, shrugging and looking at the room around him. "I lost her a while ago. She was starting to get on my nerves. Where's loverboy?"

Teddi cast one more hopeful glance around the room. "He was supposed to be getting us drinks, but I think he might have gotten distracted by something shiny." she said with a heavy sigh. Billy only held out his beer to her. Teddi raised an eyebrow.

Billy rolled his eyes. "Just take it. I'll get another one," Teddi only eyed him suspiciously. "Jesus Christ, Larsson. I didn't drug it or anything. I'm trying to be *nice*."

Teddi almost suspected Billy was drunk. But he was still a little too grouchy and seemed too alert. Maybe hell was freezing over. She hesitantly took the bottle from him and mumbled a thanks. Before Billy could say anything else, Heather had run over and was grabbing Teddi by the wrist. "*Ohmygosh*. You came! This is such an awesome party isn't it? Come on, we're playing beer pong and I need a partner!" and suddenly Teddi was being dragged through the party and outside to the back patio to play beer pong.

The rest of the party was sort of a blur. Teddi wasn't great at beer pong. She never really had been. She also had *way* too many of the red and green jello shots that had been passed around. And there hadn't been any sign of Brian the entire night. Or at least if she had seen him she didn't remember. Mostly she just remembered drinking with Heather and dancing to Jingle Bell Rock with her on the dining room table. Billy had joined in on a game of beer pong towards the end and he was of course *amazing* at it.

After that, Teddi had seen him a few times here and there. He hadn't been drinking that much. Mostly nursing a beer and one of the green jello shots after Teddi had practically forced it into his mouth. But after Teddi and Steve Harrington finally found each other and belted out a drunken duet of Baby It's Cold Outside, Teddi had lost all track of Billy.

But now it was late. And even in her current state, Teddi had no idea how she was supposed to be getting home. She was lounged out on the couch and trying her hardest not to fall asleep when someone shook her a little too roughly by the shoulder. "Christ, *what?*" she complained, trying to shove whoever it was away from her.

"Wake up, Larsson," it was Billy. "Where's Brian?" he asked.

"There you are!" Teddi said, her hands latching onto Billy's arms as if he'd disappear at any second. Teddi narrowed her eyes as she tried her hardest to spot Brian in the living room that was slowly emptying before she shrugged. "Ugh. Who knows. God, what a *dick*. He like *totally* abandoned me. I can't believe Keith called him *Prince Charming*." she crossed her arms.

Billy rolled his eyes. He hadn't seen Brian himself the entire night. Maybe Teddi had scared him off. Even Billy had been impressed with how hard she could party. She was constantly surprising him. But it was getting late now. Teddi needed to get home. He'd looked everywhere for Cheryl already, but he hadn't seen her in a few hours and Carol had said she'd seen Cheryl leaving about an hour before. So he pulled Teddi up into a sitting position. "Alright, Larsson. I'm gonna take you home. Can you stand?" he was sure if Max saw this she'd shit a fit. He was being *nice*.

"Yes I can stand," Teddi huffed. She braced herself on his arms and tried to stand, but her wobbly legs gave out from under her and she fell back onto the couch laughing. "Nope! Guess not!" she giggled.

Billy shook his head. "Let's go, Ted. Up you go." he grunted a little as he scooped her up into his arms and headed for the door.

"Wait, wait! My coat!" she complained, trying to reach for the pile of coats by the door.

He huffed and stopped. "Which one's yours?" Teddi narrowed her eyes again before jabbing a finger at her puffy, black coat. Billy yanked it from the pile and handed it to her. Teddi was a pain in the ass when she was sober, so it wasn't much of a surprise that she was even more of a pain in the ass when she was wasted. The kids in his classes at the pool were less of a mess than she was.

Teddi gripped onto both Billy and her coat tightly as they made their way outside and to Billy's Camero. "You're *strong*," she sighed out. Billy couldn't help but smirk, his chest puffing out just a little bit. Alright, so maybe drunk Teddi wasn't so bad. He opened the passenger side door and gently set Teddi inside before buckling her seatbelt so she wouldn't be sliding all over the place.

He got in after her and lit a cigarette before driving off. In a million years he would never have guessed that he'd be driving a drunk Teddi Larsson home. But he guessed there was a first time for everything.

8. Chapter 8

A/N: Sorry I didn't get this up sooner! We've been getting ready for the hurricane!

"Alright, Teddi. You gotta tell me your address so I can take you home."

Teddi scoffed. "Why? So you can *stalk* me some more?" she snapped, crossing her arms firmly and dramatically across her chest.

Billy's hand slightly clenched around the steering wheel. If Teddi was stubborn on a normal day, she was at least five times more stubborn when she was drunk. "Larsson, I'm not fucking around here..." he warned.

Teddi sighed loudly and sunk in her seat. She leaned over and rested her head against the window, watching the trees pass by in a blur. "I don't wanna go home."

Billy looked over at her. He grabbed the shoulder of her coat and pulled her upright before looking out the window made her blow chunks all over his car. "And why not?" he asked. He *knew*, or at least he had an *idea*, but he was still a little curious about whether his suspicions were correct.

"If my dad knows I was out this late and sees how shit faced I am he'll kill me. Like *literally* kill me. Fucking prick. You know I used to do this all the time back home? *Yeah*. I went to parties like...all the time. And I used to smoke because I thought it made me look *cool*, and I was actually popular until I moved to...this." she waved her hands at the bland scenery that was passing them.

Billy admittedly had sort of a hard time imagining that. Maybe New York was different. Teddi was more like that girl Samantha in his Biology class, Johnathan Byers and that chick Robin (who he was also pretty sure was a lesbian because he had tried putting the moves on her during lunch once and she had laughed so hard milk came out of her nose); weird and very *not* cool. But he smirked over at her anyways. "Is that right? What happened?"

"I moved to Hawkins and I died inside," they both laughed. Teddi studied him for a moment. "Is all this part of you trying to be *nice*? Like with the beer?"

Billy shifted uncomfortably. "I don't know...I guess."

"Well, how come you wanna be nice all of the sudden?"

"I don't know," he huffed. He supposed he could give her the long version. Complete with Max almost chopping his dick off. But he figured Teddi was a little too drunk to take any of that in. "I guess...ever since we moved here I've sorta been..."

"The worst?" Teddi finished for him with raised eyebrows.

"*Yeah*. I've got a lot of shit going on and-"

"I've got a lot of shit too. But I learned to stop being such a jerk to everyone."

"*Yeah*? Well, you're sure as hell a pain in the ass." he argued. He didn't know why Teddi drove him up the wall the way that she did. Maybe it was because he knew she was right. He hated it when other people were right about him.

Teddi crossed her arms and glared over at him. "...What's your zodiac sign?" she asked suddenly.

Billy shot her that look again. That one that like she had sprouted another head. "My *what*?"

"Your *zodiac sign*! You know, with the stars and all..." Billy only blinked. Teddi huffed. "When is your birthday?"

"...November 28th."

Teddi groaned. "A *Sagittarius*." she said curtly.

Billy didn't know why, but he felt offended by her tone. He looked over at her with an annoyed and expectant look. "And what the fuck is that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing. It just explains a *lot*. Do you know what time you were born? Or in what city?" she hadn't even noticed that Billy was looking at her like she had gone absolutely insane.

"How the fuck am I supposed to know any of that? And *what* does it explain, weird girl? What the hell is a Sagittarius?" Teddi didn't answer him. She just sat there with her arms crossed and looking like she was going through some weird girl rolodex in her head.

Suddenly she perked up. "Ooo! That means we're sister signs! I'm a Gemini!" as if Billy was supposed to have any idea what that meant.

"Gemini? *Sister* signs? Larsson, what the hell are you talking about?" he asked incredulously.

Teddi rolled her eyes. "It means that we're like super compatible...*huh*. Wouldn't have guessed that."

"Compatible like...in bed compatible?" he asked, a smirk teasing at his lips. Teddi only scoffed at the question.

"Like compatible in general. *Yin and Yang*...I guess that makes sense. I'm like super chill and you're basically the hulk," she laughed. Billy was going to throw a smart ass response her way, but before he could Teddi reached over and snatched the cigarette that was between his lips. He let out a huff to show his distaste, but Teddi ignored it. She let out a loud groan as she took a drag of the cigarette. "*Christ*, I missed these things."

Billy found himself chuckling. If someone had told him a week ago that he would be giving Teddi Larsson a ride home while she rambled on about zodiac signs and sharing a cigarette with him, he would have told them they were crazy. Yet there he was, taking his cigarette back from her after she handed it back to him with a happy, content look on her face.

"What's funny?" she asked, smiling over at him.

Billy shook his head. "Nothing. This night has just taken a really *weird* turn." that little part of him wished that this could be how things always were. Sure, he probably hadn't had a friend that was a girl

since the third grade, but he could see himself being *friends* with Teddi. If they could both get past that animosity that was always there. Well, more like if *he* could learn to control his temper a little more was more like it.

He turned onto his street, slowing the Camaro down so that the engine wouldn't wake anyone at home and let his dad know that he'd been out so late. He had missed his curfew by about two hours, but with Susan around now she and Neil held Billy to an honor system when it came to him going out. Teddi didn't look as confused as he expected her to be as he pulled up to the curb.

"You uh...said you didn't want to go home so..." he didn't know what else to say. He didn't want Teddi to know that he had figured out her secret. He would play it off as her refusing to tell him her address. If he let on that he was onto Teddi, there was a chance she would start to ask questions and soon she would be onto *his* secret.

Teddi looked over at Billy's house with narrowed eyes before looking back at him. "This is your house?" she asked.

"Yeah...look, I'm not like putting the moves on you or anything. *Trust me*. You can crash in Max's room. I just figured..." he wouldn't meet her eyes.

Teddi gave him a tired smile. "No, it's...this is *nice*." she nodded.

Billy flinched a little. He hated that his first reaction to someone telling him he'd done something nice was wanting to make some sort of biting remark. He swallowed the nasty comment and only shrugged. He shut the Camaro off and climbed out, rushing over to the other side as Teddi nearly fell out onto the street. She was giggling loudly as she tried to get herself upright.

"Christ, Larsson," he muttered as he helped her stand. "You have to *shut up*, okay? If anyone hears you we'll *both* be dead." he snapped.

Teddi pretended to zip her lips before letting out a small giggle. Billy rolled his eyes and pulled her along. But he didn't go to the front door. He led her around to the side of his house to what Teddi assumed must have been his bedroom window. She leaned up against

the wall to try to keep her balance while he expertly slid the window open. Wordlessly he bent down, his fingers intertwined to give her a boost up.

She wondered briefly just how many other girls he'd done this with before stepping into his hands and sliding clumsily into his room. It was a weird angle. If she wasn't careful she'd land down on his stereo instead of the foot of his bed. Teddi wiggled through the window and aimed herself for Billy's bed as best as her drunk mind would allow.

She landed with a soft thud and groaned. Billy was in almost immediately after her. It was obvious that he had done this more than a few times. Teddi waved him away when he tried to help her stand.

Billy's room was...exactly what she had imagined. Not that she had spent a lot of time thinking about it. It was more or less as messy as she'd expect it to be. And it had that sort of "I don't give a shit" attitude in the way he had decorated it that was very Billy. It smelled almost overwhelmingly like him. Cigarettes, his cologne and spearmint. His cologne had this really warm, woody smell to it. Sort of like a bonfire with a hint of something fresh and earthy. It gave Teddi this comfy sort of feeling whenever she smelled it and she briefly wondered if Billy had chosen the scent because it reminded him of back home. Teddi shook the idea away and looked further around his room. She rolled her eyes when she spotted the poster of Shauna Grant hanging on the wall. There were a *lot* of cassette tapes. Nearly anywhere Teddi looked there was a stack of tapes or vinyls along with a crushed beer can or two and an ashtray full of cigarette butts.

Of course there where all of his weights and workout gear, that definitely didn't surprise her. What did surprise her were the two neon boxes on a shelf in front of her. "Excuse me," she hissed, reaching up on her toes in order to reach them. "These are *Atari games!*"

Billy shushed her, shooting a dirty look in her direction. "So *what?*" he asked. He snatched the two games out of her hands and reached over her to set them back on the shelf.

Teddi swallowed nervously as Billy's chest bumped into hers momentarily before she took a step back. She shook her head and fixed an angry look up at him. "You can't call me a geek when *you're* a geek."

Billy rolled his eyes. "Everyone plays video games, Larsson. Now stop going through my shit. Unless you wanna sleep in here tonight. That's more than alright with me..." he smirked down at her.

Teddi rolled her eyes dramatically. "Don't make me *puke*, Hargrove." Billy only chuckled, taking Teddi by the arm and sneaking out of his room and down the hall. He nudged Max's door open, quickly pulling Teddi in before shutting the door behind them and turning on the light.

Two heads popped up from the bed. Max blinked wildly as she rubbed the sleep from her eyes. El watched Teddi and Billy with such a blank expression that Teddi suspected that El was positive she was only dreaming. "Billy? What the hell?" Max asked with a yawn.

"I need a *favor*." he began.

Teddi cut off whatever he was going to say next with a loud gasp. "Oh my gosh, Max, *the sleepover!*" she squealed. "Look, I didn't miss it after all!"

Billy slapped a hand over Teddi's mouth and shot a glare in her direction. "I told you, Teddi. *Be quiet.*"

"Drunk." El whispered to Max as she watched Billy attempt to keep Teddi under control.

Max raised her eyebrows and nodded. "She's *trashed*. Jesus, Billy, what did you do to her?"

"I didn't do anything," he snapped. "Heather Holloway and about a dozen jello shots did this. Look, she won't tell me where she lives and I don't know what else to do with her. Just let her crash in here and make sure she doesn't choke on her own vomit." he helped Teddi over to the edge of Max's bed so she could sit.

Max and El both shot each other a few confused looks as they

watched the pair. Billy struggled to keep Teddi still as he pulled her puffy coat and boots off. Teddi kept complaining, each time Billy hissing out a "stay *still*" before Teddi would pout and listen before the whole thing started again. Max didn't think she'd ever seen someone look so inconvenienced by being nice to someone before. And what was even more confusing to her was the fact that Billy had nearly gone out of his way to put himself in this position.

"Did *he* do that?" El asked Max quietly, nodding towards Teddi's bruised eye.

Max shook her head. "She said she slipped on ice or something. It's been like that for a few days." she explained as El watched Teddi carefully.

Billy tossed Teddi's coat and shoes aside and stood, jabbing a finger in Max's direction. "Make sure she doesn't wake anyone up, alright? I'll take her back to her car in the morning. And neither of you tell anyone about this, got it?"

"Whatever, Billy. Just get out of my room already." Max hopped out of bed and nearly shoved her older brother out of her room. He shot a slightly worried glance in Teddi's direction before glaring down at Max. He jerked away from her and disappeared down the hall to his own room. Max shut her door again and let out a heavy sigh. Teddi was lying on her back, staring blankly up at the ceiling.

"...You guys wanna play truth or dare or something?" she asked, her voice slightly slurring.

Max and El both stifled giggles. "Teddi, it's a little late for that. I think you need to get some sleep...what are you doing with Billy anyways?" Max asked as she got back into bed.

"My date totally ditched me. And Billy said he's trying to be nice...did you know that he's a Sagittarius?"

El frowned. "What's a Sagittarius?" she asked.

Teddi sat up quickly and turned to face the two girls. "*What's a Sagittarius?*" she repeated, her jaw dropped. "You guys don't know

about zodiac signs either?" the two girls shook their heads. "God, what is *wrong* with this town? Okay, forget about truth or dare. I have like...*loads* to teach you. It'll totally blow your minds."

Teddi turned to face Max and El, crossing her legs. Max hopped out of bed once again before muttering "wait, wait, wait!" before disappearing for a few moments. She returned with a bowl of popcorn and three cans of coke. The three settled in and Teddi launched into her zodiac lesson. Maybe her night wouldn't be such a bust after all. Getting drunk with Heather and teaching two twelve year olds about their zodiac traits at two in the morning way more fun than anything she would've done hanging out with some idiot on the soccer team. Hanging out with Billy hadn't been so bad either. It was too bad she probably wouldn't remember most of it in the morning.

9. Chapter 9

A/N: Thanks everyone for the well wishes about the hurricane! Thankfully it didn't hit us too badly. I would've gotten this out sooner, but I was at horror nights this weekend. I got to see our boy Billy and walk through the Palace arcade. I'd definitely recommend going if you can!

Teddi woke up the next morning with a loud groan. The sun was shining so brightly in through the window she was almost too afraid to open her eyes. She also had the overwhelming feeling that something was *off*. Holding a hand up in an attempt to shield herself from the light, Teddi slowly cracked one eye open to look around at her surroundings. This definitely wasn't her room. Her heart started to beat a little faster as she tried her hardest to remember everything from the night before. She remembered getting ditched, playing beer pong...Billy? Had he given her a ride home? Something about that didn't feel right.

She remembered hanging out with Max and El, and when Teddi spotted the empty popcorn bowl and three empty cans of coke sitting on the dresser she realized that maybe Billy *had* given her a ride. To his house. Neither Max or El were there. It didn't really sound like *anyone* was home until Teddi picked up on the sound of the shower coming from down the hall. She groaned again, rubbing at her temples as the bathroom door opened and Billy strolled out surrounded by a cloud of steam.

"Morning, Sleeping Beauty," he teased. Teddi only stared blankly at him as Billy moved to Max's doorway, toweling off his hair. "You're not dreaming, Larsson. It's really me." it was like he could read her mind. His cocky tone was enough to knock Teddi back into reality and she rolled her eyes.

"What *happened*?" she asked.

"You got wasted last night. And you wouldn't tell me where you lived, so I brought you here and you crashed with Max. I thought that was better than you waking up on David's couch." Teddi rubbed at her eyes and smudged the makeup she had forgotten she'd been

wearing. Billy watched Teddi as she stared up at the ceiling for a moment before she slowly sat up.

"...I think I'm gonna puke." she announced. Billy wordlessly moved aside to let Teddi pass. She hurried into the still steamy bathroom, kneeling down in front of the toilet and emptying her stomach. Billy watched on with an amused look.

Teddi's top rode up her back slightly as she bent over the toilet, and Billy caught a glimpse of something bright and pink peeking out from the top of her skirt. He crossed his arms over his chest and grinned. "Is that a *tattoo*, Larsson?"

Teddi's hand instinctively reached behind her to pull her top down. She glared over at him before grabbing a few pieces of toilet paper. She wiped her mouth and flushed the toilet. "Are you seriously checking me out while I'm throwing up? Don't you have any *shame*?"

"Nope."

She rolled her eyes. Now that she didn't feel quite as sick anymore, it was a little more obvious to her that Billy was in nothing but a towel. "God, can you put some clothes on?"

"Why? Am I making you nervous?" it was driving Teddi absolutely insane how amused and almost *happy* Billy seemed to see her in this state.

"I'm just trying not to puke again." Billy chuckled as Teddi stood and moved to the sink to wash her face. Her black eye, now turning a yellow shade as it healed, was in full view. Billy pretended not to notice.

"That why you were telling me how *strong* I was last night?" he asked.

Teddi scoffed. "I *definitely* don't believe that...I didn't totally freak Max and El out, did I?"

"How the hell should I know? I dumped you off in Max's room and went to bed." that wasn't entirely true. After he had gotten in bed he could hear the three girls giggling like idiots, so the two girls had clearly enjoyed *whatever* it was Teddi had been talking about. Max

hadn't said much the next morning. She threw his bedroom door open and told him that Neil and Susan left for a movie date and she was going over to El's before throwing a "Your girlfriend's still asleep." over her shoulder. The little shit.

Teddi couldn't remember much of what happened during the impromptu sleepover. She was pretty sure she had told them they should start an all girls D&D group, but that was about it. She let out a groan. "...What time is it? I have to be at the pool at ten."

"It's Christmas Eve, Larsson. Pool's closed."

"*Shit..*that's right. I guess now I can knock out for a few more hours until I have to be at the arcade," she sighed with a short laugh. She couldn't believe Christmas had crept up on her so quickly. She felt like she might have to throw up again.

Billy was pretty sure he'd never seen someone so completely *depressed* at the idea of Christmas Eve. He also wasn't sure if Teddi knew how much she was letting her disappointment show. He felt like he was getting a peek behind the chipper, always happy Teddi curtain. "Uh...just let me get dressed. I'll give you a ride back to your car." Teddi only nodded and gently splashed her face with warm water again.

A few moments later Billy emerged from his room in a pair of his infamous tight blue jeans, a white tank top and a jean jacket. *Of course he looks like that and I look like roadkill*, she thought bitterly. Teddi pulled on her boots and her jacket and silently followed Billy out to his car. The awkward silence during the drive made her want to scream, and she let out a relieved sigh when Billy turned the radio on with a jab of his finger.

"Um, so...thank you. For all of this..." Teddi knew that Billy didn't like pleasantries like this, but she truly did appreciate that he had looked out for her.

Billy shook his head and refused to meet her glance. "Don't worry about it, Teddi."

"No, really. I mean you could have just *left* me there."

"I'm not a complete fucking dick, Larsson," Billy snapped. "I give you shit sometimes. I'm not about to leave you passed out on the couch for some creep to feel up on." and while that was just...common human decency, Teddi was a little surprised to hear something like that from Billy. It made her feel a tiny bit guilty for thinking so little of him so often. He could be a dick sure, but he wasn't *evil*.

Teddi pinched the bridge of her nose. "That's not what I meant. It's just...I guess I'm not used to other people looking out for me. I usually look after myself. So can you just let me say thank you without arguing with me like a *normal* person?" she snapped.

Billy scoffed, but said nothing. Like the day at Melvald's, Billy had caught a glimpse of a genuine anger that he hadn't known that Teddi had. It was more than just the general annoyance she felt when they bickered. This was something he could see in her eyes. It looked similar to the anger he felt. Teddi was just obviously much better at working past it than he was.

Teddi knew that Billy hadn't believed her lie about falling on ice. She knew that in some capacity he had put two and two together and he knew that there was *something* more going on that she didn't want to talk about. And there was part of her that wanted nothing more than to just tell someone about it, especially at a moment like this. But it was *Billy*. If she said anything she knew that he wouldn't have cared.

So she bit back the rest of her explanation as to *why* she had been grateful for Billy looking out for her, and instead neither of them said anything. They both sat silently as Billy drove her back to the arcade and listened to the Scorpions. When he finally pulled into the arcade's parking lot she almost let out a cry of relief. "So...thanks again. I guess I'll see you...*whenever*,"

Billy held up his hand in a short wave, but said nothing. Teddi quickly slid out of the Camaro and took a step back as Billy nearly peeled out of the parking lot and sped off. "Such a jackass," Teddi muttered as she headed over to her van. She rested her head against the steering wheel and let out another loud groan. She was never going to let herself drink that much again. Her head felt like a rock.

The drive home felt like it took forever. It was silent except for the

thump, thump, thump that repeated in Teddi's head as if her skull was threatening to explode. Thankfully her dad's car wasn't in the driveway. Whether that meant he was working or somewhere else, Teddi only cared that he wasn't home. Her mother was though. Bonnie Larsson was sitting at the kitchen table flipping through a magazine and completely unaware that Teddi had come home.

"...Hey, mom." Teddi muttered.

Her mom didn't look up. "Hmmm? Hi, Teddi. Aren't you supposed to be at work?" and to think Teddi had been so worried that she'd get in trouble for being out all night. She probably could've taken a trip down to Mexico with Billy and neither of her parents would have noticed. It almost annoyed her.

"I don't have to go in until later...where's dad?" she asked tentatively.

Bonnie flipped another page of her magazine. "He's working. Some big meeting today or something." Teddi found that to be unusual. The construction team for the Starcourt mall was having a team meeting on Christmas Eve? Some higher up thought it was important enough to have her dad at that meeting? In any case, Teddi was sure that's all she'd be getting out of her mother no matter how many questions she had now.

"Oh, okay...I'll be in my room," her mom let out a small hum, and Teddi headed down the hall to her bedroom, shutting the door quietly behind her. She landed face first down onto her bed and let out a loud groan. She had half a mind to just fall asleep right then and there with her coat and boots still on.

Then her phone rang.

Teddi groaned again, sitting up and reaching over for the hot pink phone that sat on her nightstand. "Hello?" she grumbled, rubbing at her forehead in an attempt to get rid of her headache.

"Teddi! *How could you not have told me?*" it was Heather.

"Uh...that depends. How could I have not told you what?" Teddi asked with a frown.

"That you *totally* hooked up with Billy Hargrove last night!"

Teddi sat up quickly, her eyes going wide. She felt like she was going to puke again. "What? *What?* That totally, *completely* did not happen-" she stuttered out. On her drive home she had remembered bits and pieces of the night before. Billy driving her home. Smoking together. She definitely didn't remember anything that was even in the realm of hooking up.

"Teddi, it's *me*. You can tell me. I can't blame you, I mean he's *Billy*. You *have* to tell me what it was like."

Teddi pinched the bridge of her nose. "Heather, I barely even remember last night and I can still confidently tell you that absolutely *nothing* happened with Billy and me."

Heather let out a short huff. "*Please*. Tommy said that last night he walked in on Cheryl Burns and Brian Jean hooking up in David's parents bedroom, and then he said he saw Billy carrying you out to his car a few hours later." well, at least that explained where Brian went. The asshole. But the fact that all of these pieces were enough to actually make it look like she had in fact drunkenly hooked up with *Billy* was enough to make her want to scream.

"Heather, trust me. If I hooked up with someone I would tell you. He just gave me a ride home is all." and of course the insane idea of Billy Hargrove giving someone a ride out of the goodness of his heart probably made her story sound that much more like a lie.

Heather was silent for a few moments on the other line, most likely trying to decide whether she believed Teddi or not. "This is the last time I get gossip from Tommy. He *never* knows what he's talking about. I'm pretty sure half the time he makes stuff up just so people will pay attention to him. Anyways, I guess I'll see you at work in a few days?"

Teddi nodded, extremely grateful that Heather had decided to drop the topic. "Yep. See ya then, Heather." Heather hung up after an all too cherry "Merry Christmas!" and Teddi set the phone down with a sigh of relief. That relief quickly turned into annoyance as she kicked her boots off angrily in the direction of her closet. Did Billy have any

idea what people were saying about them? If they hadn't gotten into that fight in his car would he have told her? Even if he did, what would he care? He probably *loved* the fact that the entire school thought he'd finally gotten her in bed.

She was muttering angrily to herself as she finally changed from her party outfit and into some pajamas. Even when he was being nice he still somehow managed to be a thorn in her side. Teddi decided that the next time she saw him it would be *her* throwing *him* in the pool. But now it was time for much, *much* needed sleep. If she could stop stewing over Billy. *He ruins everything*, she thought with a huff.

A/N: Oh man...I'm so excited for the next chapter. It's finally Christmas. Progress is gonna be made. Buckle up y'all.

10. Chapter 10

A/N: I'm so excited to finally post this chapter. There's some chapters later on that I'm excited to share but this is probably one of my favorite chapters for this fic. I hope y'all enjoy it as much as I did!

It turned out that *everything* was closed in Hawkins on Christmas. So Teddi's initial, pathetic plan of hiding out in the coffee shop for the day with Lord of the Rings was a bust. It had been different in New York. If there hadn't been anything in town open, Teddi could always make the short drive into the city and *something* would be open. She'd spent a lot of Christmases in Chinese food joints with a book over the years. Now she was resigned to going to her spot at the lake. The kids had told her about it. She'd overheard them talking about a place they called Bywater Pool and the Tolkien fan in her had to know all about it.

Usually on Christmas her family would play pretend for just a little while. They'd wake up relatively early and Teddi would get her gift before they went their separate ways for the rest of the day. This Christmas her dad wasn't even home. Her mom had mentioned he'd got some overtime working on the mall and he wouldn't be home until late that night. So Teddi made herself some toast with jam and headed out for her very lonely Christmas day while her mom stayed home and did...whatever it was that she did all day. Teddi didn't really know. Or care.

She didn't go to the lake often. It had been easier when she had first moved to Hawkins and it hadn't been so cold. Teddi would drive out, park next to the water and flip the radio on while she sat on the hood of her van and read a book until she finally managed to drag herself back home. Now the lake would be frozen over and everything would be covered in snow. But it would be peaceful and she'd get out of the house. That's what really mattered.

But of course, as most things lately, things wouldn't go according to plan. As Teddi got closer to the lake, she realized there was another car parked by the water. And not just any car. Billy's Camaro. She gripped her steering wheel tightly. Of all the places in Hawkins, on all of the days, why did he have to be here at *her* spot? Teddi pulled

up next to him, rolling down her window and glaring over at him. Billy was reclined back in his seat, eyes trained out on the frozen water and smoking a cigarette. His radio was playing so loudly she was sure he hadn't heard her pull up.

"Seriously, are you actually stalking me, Hargrove?" she asked with a loud huff. Billy's head snapped over in her direction, suddenly aware that he was no longer alone, and rolled his eyes when he spotted Teddi practically pouting at him. "It's *Christmas*. Don't you have anything better to do?"

"I could ask you the same thing, Larsson. This is *my* spot." he blew smoke out in her direction.

Teddi scoffed. "Your spot? It's *my* spot. I've *never* seen you here before." she argued. Despite how tired he looked, Billy smirked.

"That's probably 'cause I come here later than you."

Gross, Teddi thought as her nose scrunched up. "Please don't tell me this is where you bring girls."

"Fine, I won't tell you." Teddi rolled her eyes at the smug look on Billy's face and turned away from him. She grabbed her book and settled in for a long day of the never ending quest that was continuing to ignore Billy Hargrove. It didn't last long. She hadn't even read half a page before she found herself looking over at him out of the corner of her eyes. Why wouldn't he be home on Christmas morning? Where was Max? Had he heard about the rumor that Tommy H had started? And if he had, why wasn't he teasing her about it?

"...Have you spoken to Heather?" she found herself suddenly asking.

"No. Why would I?" he had a point. He was social at work, sure, but outside of that he mostly kept to himself unless Teddi was around for him to torment.

She felt a little relieved though. Clearly he hadn't heard. Teddi shook her head. "Nothing. She just called me yesterday about something stupid Tommy told her," Billy didn't say anything, he just rose his

eyebrows expectantly as he waited for her to spill the beans. Teddi huffed and set down her book. "He said he found Cheryl and Brian hooking up, and then when he saw you carrying me out to the car..." she didn't finish the rest. She didn't need to. Billy chuckled.

"If Heather actually thinks I got in your pants then she doesn't know you all that well, Larsson." Teddi let out a small laugh herself. Again, he had a point. She was also a little surprised he wasn't taking the opportunity to tease her.

"Are you..." Teddi scratched the back of her neck awkwardly. "Are you okay? I mean, you're *here* and not home..."

Billy flicked the butt of his cigarette out of the window with a shrug. "I'm fine. Just don't feel like being home. Like you." that gave Teddi an entire list of questions that she wanted to ask him, but she knew better than that. If she pushed then he would just snap at her as per usual.

So she settled for a less complicated question. "You hate Christmas too, huh?" she almost winced at how stupid she sounded. But if it was one thing the two of them bonded over, it was things they both hated.

"You could say that." he said flatly.

Teddi pursed her lips for a moment. She would probably regret this decision, but she would blame that whole Christmas giving spirit. "...It's probably a lot warmer in the van. I was thinking of sitting in the back. You can join me as long as you promise not to be, you know...the worst." she said with a small smile to let him know she was teasing.

Billy looked at her silently for a moment before smirking. "Are you flirting with me, weird girl?"

"Don't flatter yourself. I'm only offering because Max would probably be pretty upset with me if I let you die from hypothermia." she said with an over dramatic eye roll. She was surprised when Billy shut the Camaro off, grabbed his cigarettes and lighter and slid out of the car. She crawled over her seat to the back and threw the doors open to let

him in.

Billy hadn't known what he was expecting from Teddi's van, but it wasn't what he found. There was *actually* shag carpeting. It matched the light blue velvet that was covering the walls inside. A bright pink bean bag chair sat behind the passenger side seat and across from that was a two person seat that was folded up and fastened down. There were a few empty, slightly crushed Tab cans scattered around, along with a stack of board games (Billy couldn't help but roll his eyes when he spotted Dungeons and Dragons), some magazines and a bright yellow, rolled up sleeping bag that was covered in colorful flowers. There was also a *disco ball* hanging from the ceiling. It all somehow screamed *Teddi*.

"Sorry, it's kind of a mess in here. But I don't usually have company..." Teddi said nervously as she tried to kick the empty soda cans aside. Billy didn't say anything. He plopped down onto the bean bag and jabbed his thumb towards the radio.

"I am *not* listening to this shit."

Teddi gaped at him. "It's Siouxsie and the Banshees!" she argued.

"It's *garbage*. Don't you listen to anything good?" he asked, leaning over the passenger's seat and opening the glove compartment. Teddi watched on with both confusion and amusement as he thumbed through her cassette tapes. "You listen to *Kiss*? Jesus, Ted, there's no hope for us *ever* being friends." his back was turned to her, but she could hear from his tone that he was kidding. Not that it mattered to her or anything.

"And what's wrong with *Kiss*?" she asked, settling down onto the carpet and crossing her legs.

"They're for chicks."

Teddi laughed. "I *am* a chick, Billy."

He shrugged. "You know what I mean." he took the cassette out of the deck and replaced it with the *Kiss* tape he'd found before returning to the bean bag.

"I don't get in your Camaro and rummage through everything, you know." she argued. Teddi pulled a small cooler out from under the driver's seat and flipped it open. She pulled out another can of Tab and held it up to Billy.

He took it and gave Teddi a knowing grin. "Yeah, you just steal my smokes," as if mentioning them had reminded him of their presence, he reached into his pocket and pulled a cigarette out. He placed it between his lips and lit it, taking a drag before offering it to Teddi. She hesitated, and Billy rolled his eyes. "I think we already established I don't have *cooties*, Larsson."

Teddi let out a soft huff-like laugh and took the cigarette. "So you know my secret then, huh?"

"Secret?" Billy snorted. "You're even chattier when you're wasted. You almost told me your whole life story," the worried look that Teddi had made him drop the subject. He took a drink, watching her fidget around uncomfortably. "...So how come you hate Christmas?"

Teddi took a somewhat shaky drag of the cigarette, blowing out a cloud of smoke slowly before handing it back to Billy. She shrugged. "I've *always* hated it, I guess...it wasn't so bad when I was little. I got presents then at least. But it was always really obvious that my mom just dumped the first couple of dolls she saw into a cart and bought them. When I got older they would just give me a card with some cash. *This year* I don't think either of them even realize it's Christmas." she said with a small laugh. Over the years Teddi had saved up the money she'd received for Christmas. At first she had been a little too young to fully understand *why* she was doing it (she later realized it was simply intuition). There was almost this voice in her head that had just urged her to hoard it. Eventually she started working and added to her savings. She only spent a little here and there on clothes and her van. Now she was sitting on quite the nest egg.

And I thought I had it bad, Billy thought. Susan had at least gotten him some presents. A couple of albums and some shirts she knew he'd like. Christ, *Neil* had even gotten him gifts when it had just been the two of them. It was always some stupid hobby he wanted Billy to pick up. Baseball bats, a basketball, cleats. When he had turned

thirteen Neil had gotten him a bb gun, but when Billy shot out the window of Neil's car "on accident" Neil had thrown it in the fireplace and Billy had gotten one hell of a "talking to".

"What are they, drunks or something?" he asked. He knew that if he'd been talking to anyone else that he would have never asked a question like that. He never would've gotten so personal. Even now with Teddi he knew there was a chance that she would shut him out. But at least he felt comfortable enough with her to ask.

"Dad is," Teddi said with a heavy sigh. "My mom just...doesn't care about anything that doesn't have to do with her. Back in New York she used to be one of those really big yuppie moms that went to cocktail parties and had all this really ugly white furniture..." her voice drifted a little. She'd been a little surprised that she had shared that much. It hadn't seemed like much, sure, but when Teddi tried so hard to keep everything about her home life so close to the chest sharing much of anything about her parents was sort of a big deal to her. But what seemed like an even bigger surprise to her was that Billy actually seemed *interested* in what she was saying. "...What about you?" she asked carefully.

Billy's head fell back as he breathed out smoke. "Just...not into all that family shit I guess," but that wasn't very fair of him. He had asked Teddi about her family and she had given him answers. Not many, but Billy knew it was enough to be a big deal to Teddi. He could at least return the favor. "...Susan likes to pretend like we're the fucking Cleavers. My dad sits on the couch with a beer and checks out unless things get too loud. Max only comes inside for dinner and to sleep," it was the cleaned up version, but it seemed to appease Teddi. He was grateful she didn't look at him with pity, but that was probably because they were in the same boat. Even though neither of them wanted to say it out loud.

Really Billy just wanted out of the house. He had played his part in Susan's perfect family fantasy. The four of them had all sat around the Christmas tree and opened presents. Neil had been in his usual spot on the couch, glaring down at Billy and Max with a silent threat to make sure they let Susan know how much they *loved* and *appreciated* everything she had done to make their Christmas so wonderful which made it all feel less genuine somehow. Once the

presents had been opened, Max had grabbed her new skateboard and was outside before anyone could stop her. So Billy went to his room, changed, grabbed his keys and was out of the house before Neil could get off the couch. He had heard Susan calling after him. He could hear the disappointment in her voice, and he *did* feel a little bad for leaving. He didn't feel much towards Susan in general but pity. She did him a solid every once and awhile when it came to Neil, but that was about it. He definitely resented her for letting Neil speak to Max the way he did. And of course he'd have to hear from Neil once he got home. That didn't matter to him right now. Anything was better than having to sit around pretending they were one big, happy family.

Billy dropped the cigarette into the now empty can of Tab and nodded at Teddi. "So, what's the tattoo of?" he asked. He definitely wasn't about to spend his Christmas having a pity party with her. And Teddi seemed to welcome the change of subject.

Teddi let out a loud snort, smiling and shaking her head. "I am *totally* not telling you."

"Come on, Larsson. It's *Christmas*," Teddi clicked her tongue against her teeth but couldn't quite hide the fact that she was still smiling. She rose to her knees, turning her back to Billy. She flipped the band of her jeans down to reveal the tattoo. Billy leaned forward to get a better look and let out a soft laugh. "A *butterfly*?"

"*I know*," Teddi groaned, turning back around. "I thought it was like...cool and symbolic or whatever." the weirdest thing about this exchange was that it didn't feel weird to Teddi. Things never felt weird between her and Billy when he could just relax around her. She wished things could be like this more often. She *liked* hanging out with Billy when he was like this.

"And completely cliché." Billy teased.

She rolled her eyes. "Oh, like a skull smoking a cigarette?" Billy made a mocking face at her. Teddi laughed softly and pulled her knees to her chest. She rested her chin on her knee, tilting her head as she looked at Billy. "You know...if someone told me like...a *week* ago that I'd be spending Christmas in the back of my van with *you* I think I

would've laughed them out of the building."

Billy flashed a nearly devilish grin. "You know, the last time I was in the back of a van with a girl-

"*Oh my god.* You ruin *everything*, Hargrove." Teddi laughed. Billy laughed, one of his genuine laughs again, and Teddi decided she really liked it when Billy smiled. Sure, the grin he flashed all the girls was definitely nice to look at. But *this* smile was almost like a secret. Like she was getting a look at the *real* Billy that not many others got. The one that he tried so hard to hide from everyone. It looked good on him.

He pointed at the stack of games next to her. "Alright, if we're gonna be here all day and you're not gonna do what *I* want then break out Dungeons and Dragons," the look on Teddi's face was priceless. Her jaw dropped and she let out the tiniest gasp at his suggestion.

"*You're* gonna play Dungeons and Dragons?"

Billy laughed again. "Fuck no. That's for making fun of my tattoo. And I'm not playing Dream Phone either," Teddi scoffed loudly and gave him a dramatic eye roll, but Billy caught her smile as she turned to the stack of games. She pulled out Clue and held it up to him with raised eyebrows. "Deal. Pass me another Tab."

It took three rounds of Clue and a game of Operation for Teddi to find out that Billy was *extremely* competitive and that he was amazing at pretty much every board game in existence. Teddi was sure that there wasn't a single thing that Billy was bad at. Maybe except basic manners. Eventually she talked him into a round of Dream Phone (he of course won that too) and Billy fished out a stack of tapes out of the Camaro and brought them over to the van to show Teddi what *real* music was.

Teddi *liked* Billy's music. Billy would've fallen on his ass if he hadn't already been sitting on it when he found out that Teddi was as big of a Metallica fan as he was. "If you like Metallica then how can you listen to all this new wave shit?" he asked incredulously.

"I'm a very open minded girl ...stop smirking at me, pervert."

Eventually the sun started to set, and the pair decided to go their separate ways. Billy hopped out of the back of the van, shoving his hands into the pockets of his jacket before turning back to Teddi. "You gonna be at the pool tomorrow?" he asked.

"Yep. Bright and early. You?"

"Bright and early," he repeated with a nod. "Later, Larsson. *Merry Christmas*," he said in a teasing tone before heading over to the Camaro. Teddi crawled back into the driver's seat, unaware that she was still smiling until she noticed her discarded copy of the Fellowship of the Rings in the seat beside her. She had spent an *entire* day with Billy Hargrove, and she had *enjoyed* herself. Maybe hell was freezing over. Or maybe Billy just wasn't quite as bad as he liked for people to think.

11. Chapter 11

Steve Harrington has entered the chat ladies and gentlemen. I would like to apologize in advanced for Billy being a difficult bastard. It won't last much longer I promise. I hope y'all like Steve, he's gonna be showing up a lot more often from now on and I'll be honest I'm just a tad bit nervous about writing him. I'm also planting the seeds for a plot line that'll be happening later on in the fic. Actually, two plot lines! It's gonna be big y'all. And I know you'll love it

Christmas had come and gone. It was the night before New Year's Eve, and Teddi hadn't spoken to Billy once since their day at the lake. It wasn't for a lack of trying. When he showed up for work at the pool the next day Teddi had smiled and waved from her seat at the lifeguard's chair...and he had ignored her. He wouldn't even *look* at her. If she came within five feet of him he would be off in the opposite direction. To say it confused her was an understatement.

Had she done something wrong? Said something to him that upset him? Or was this just Billy being Billy? Things at the lake had seemed good. *Normal*. Teddi briefly wondered if maybe something had happened at home. Maybe his dad and Susan had been mad that he'd ditched on Christmas. But that had to be her own paranoia talking. Max had been plenty vocal about how Neil was an asshole, but that was about it. He was just an overly strict asshole.

After a few days Teddi decided to drop it. She wouldn't push him or the subject. She was sure that whatever bug that was up his ass would go away eventually and he'd be the ever present pain in her ass once more. For now she had preteens to deal with.

"You think I won't unplug it, Lucas?" Teddi could hear Mike yelling from across the arcade. The gang was all there, sans Dustin. Lucas and Mike had been battling it out in Pac-Man for the last hour, and Mike was positive Lucas had to be cheating.

"Don't be mad at me because you *suck*, Mike! You're all just jealous because you don't have the *skills* that I have." Lucas said with a proud smile as he pointed at his initials that sat at the top of the high scores screen. Max and El both shared a playful eyeroll.

"Mike, maybe we should just play something else-" Will suggested. Mike's back was to him and he clearly couldn't see that Will was trying his hardest not to laugh at how *utterly* upset Mike was getting. Mike let out a huff, dropping to his knees and reaching behind the machine for the power cord. "Mike! Come on, it's a game!"

"You touch that cord and you're gonna get banned, Wheeler." Teddi warned. Mike froze before slowly turning to face her with wide eyes.

"But he's *cheating*." Mike argued. The fear of being caught had quickly worn off and he was back in attack mode.

"Or maybe you just suck at Pac-Man," Teddi teased. Lucas flashed another grin at Mike who was now pouting. Teddi's attention turned to El. "Oh! How're you liking the new bike, El?"

El smiled brightly and looked out of the arcade's window to where her white bike was parked next to Mike's. "It's *perfect*," she said. "Thank you for helping, Teddi."

Teddi waved a hand at her and ruffled her hair. "Anything for my favorite little fellow Gemini."

Lucas made a face. "What's a Gemini?"

Max rolled her eyes. "Of course you wouldn't know what that is." Lucas blinked wildly and looked at Mike and Will who each looked as confused as he was.

The arcade doors suddenly swung open, and Dustin came running in carrying a mason jar that was half way filled with change. He looked around the room wildly before finally spotting his friends and running over. Steve Harrington was close behind him. Steve nodded at the group and looked down at Mike with an amused but confused smile. "What's dingus doing on the floor?"

"He's mad because he sucks at Pac-Man." Lucas explained.

Teddi shook her head. "You want tokens, Dustin?" he nodded excitedly, holding out his jar for her. "Keep away from the plugs, Wheeler." she warned before taking Dustin's change and heading back towards the prize counter. Steve followed after.

Teddi and Steve were pretty good friends. Between being the kids' unofficial babysitters and having a few classes together they had managed to get along pretty well despite running in different circles. She *also* knew that Billy had apparently nearly killed him about a month back, even though Steve never really wanted to tell her what had happened.

"You got any plans tomorrow night?" Steve asked as Teddi busied herself with trading in Dustin's change for tokens.

"You know that I don't." she laughed.

Steve flashed her his signature lopsided grin and leaned up against the counter top. "My parents are having this big bash at our house. They're inviting like...*everyone* in town. So a bunch of us were gonna have a bonfire. There's this old steel mill that's like twenty minutes out of town."

Teddi scrunched her nose. "This isn't gonna be anything like David's Christmas party, right?" just thinking about those jello shots brought that nauseous feeling back.

"No," Steve laughed. "No, definitely not. No reindeer used as projectile missiles, I promise."

She supposed it wouldn't hurt to go. Teddi imagined that if her parents would be at Steve's for the night (which if they had been invited Teddi knew her mother would *definitely* be there) it would be a lot less pathetic to go to a bonfire than to sit around at home alone. "Sure, I'll go. Where's this steel mill?"

"Oh, well I can pick you up here if you want. I gotta drop Dustin off at the Wheeler's anyways. He says they're gonna play that game and...kill a dragon or whatever." he chuckled.

Teddi smiled and nodded. "Okay, yeah that would be...oh *great*." she let out a heavy sigh. Steve frowned and turned around to see what it was Teddi was looking at. Billy had walked in. He looked around the arcade for a moment, probably looking for Max, before his eyes landed on Steve and Teddi. Then he made a bee line for them.

"How's it going, Harrington?" Billy leaned against the counter beside Steve, glancing at the both of them before his eyes settled on Teddi. "I didn't realize you two knew each other." the comment was casual, but Teddi could hear the venom that was dripping from it.

"Oh yeah, we're old friends." Steve said coolly. Teddi watched the two of them with an unimpressed look. Men were so *strange*. Steve was a *dork*. But anytime Billy was within eyesight he'd stand up as tall as he could, puff out his chest and suddenly he was "King Steve". Whatever that was supposed to even mean.

"Do you need something, Billy?" Teddi asked. It would be much easier to simply get Billy out of the arcade than letting him and Steve face off and risk the two fighting again.

"I'm picking up Max. She around?"

"Last I saw she was over by Pac-Man. With *Lucas*." Steve said with a smile. Teddi frowned as she watched Billy's expression turn into a glare.

"Wait, what's wrong with Max hanging out with Lucas?" she asked, looking between the two. Neither of them said anything, and the whole situation was beginning to give Teddi a bad taste in her mouth. "*What's wrong with Lucas, Billy?*" she asked again.

"Yeah, Hargrove. What's wrong with Lucas?" Billy's jaw only clenched.

Teddi walked around the counter quickly, grabbing Billy by the arm and nearly dragging him back to the breakroom. She stood in front of the door in a pathetic attempt to keep him from leaving. "*Explain*. Now. Why don't you want Max around Lucas? And I swear to god if you say *anything* that I don't like, Billy..." she warned.

Billy rolled his eyes and leaned up against the wall in an attempt to put as much distance between them as the small room would allow. "I don't have to explain *shit*. Why don't you go back to your boyfriend and leave me the hell alone."

Teddi wasn't even going to dignify that comment with a response. But

at least Billy was talking to her again. Small victories she supposed. As pathetic as that was. Teddi crossed her arms firmly across her chest. "Can you just tell me what the hell is going on? Because if Steve is insinuating what I think he is I will totally kick your ass right here and now, Hargrove."

"Jesus Christ..." Billy sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. "I'm not a fucking racist if that's what you're thinking, Teddi. I don't give a shit who she hangs out with. It's my dad. If he knew that Max was hanging around Lucas..." Teddi realized that there was a pattern with Billy. Whenever his anger really spiked Billy would bring his dad into it. Maybe Teddi wasn't just paranoid. Maybe she was suspicious for a good reason. "*She* doesn't get in trouble. *I do*. And I'm sick of him bitching at me because she won't listen."

"Billy..." Teddi said carefully. He wouldn't meet her eyes. "Does he...I mean, are things with you and your dad..." she'd never felt so awkward before. How did you even *ask* something like that? She was going through it herself and she didn't know how to ask.

Billy scoffed. "Don't start this with me." he spat.

"Start *what*?"

"You *know* what!" he jabbed a finger in her direction. "Why don't you tell me how you *really* got that black eye? Do you think I'm stupid? Why should I tell you *anything* if you won't do the same?" Teddi didn't say anything. She couldn't. She knew that Billy had been suspicious. But to have him confront her with the fact that he knew the truth felt like a bucket of cold water had been dumped on her. "I don't give a shit if I look like an asshole to you, or Max, or anyone else. I do what I have to do. Now move out of my goddamn way, Teddi."

Teddi swallowed thickly and wordlessly stepped aside and let Billy out. He was out of the break room and barking at Max to get in the car before Teddi could blink. Steve watched Billy leave and shook his head. "Man, that guy's an asshole," he turned back to Teddi, frowning at the expression on her face. "Teddi, you okay?"

She blinked suddenly, looking over at Steve. "Huh? Yeah, yeah I'm

fine. Uh, I gotta get these to Dustin. I'll see you tomorrow night?" she didn't give him a chance to answer. She picked up all of Dustin's token and headed back over to the kids.

Billy was driving way too fast. Max wouldn't say anything. She was used to it. So she just sat there quietly with her arms crossed while Billy threw his tantrum. He knew that none of this had been Teddi's fault, but his instincts were telling him to blame her.

When he had come home from his afternoon at the lake, Neil had been pissed. Billy expected it. To a degree at least. When he'd walked in Neil, Susan and Max had all been sitting at the table. The table had been set and the dinner that Susan had cooked was sitting untouched in front of them. Neil hadn't let them eat until Billy came home apparently.

"Your mother went out of her way to cook a nice meal-" Neil had begun.

"She's *not* my mother." that had really done it. Neil loved to humiliate Billy. Sometimes it wasn't enough to hit him so hard that he saw stars. Neil would call him every name in the book, and he'd do it all with an audience. Susan never tried to stop it. Max had tried a few times, and each time she and Billy had *both* learned the hard way.

That night Billy had to sit down for Christmas dinner refusing to meet anyone's eyes while he dabbed at his bleeding nose every so often after Neil made them all say grace. What a joke *that* was.

"Did something happen with Teddi?" Max asked suddenly.

"No."

"Are you sure? You looked pretty pissed off when you came out of that break room." she said matter-of-factly.

"Max..." Billy warned.

"You shouldn't be such an asshole to her."

"Oh yeah?" he asked, shooting a glance her way. "And why's that?"

"Because. You're stuck with me, but she's the only person that willingly keeps putting up with your shit. Pretty soon she's gonna get tired of you and you're gonna be *alone*."

Rather than admitting to Max that she was even a little bit right, Billy changed the subject. "I thought I told you to stay away from Lucas." Billy didn't get why Max bothered hanging out with Lucas and his loser friends. He'd never gotten it. Keeping it from Neil aside, it seemed like any time Billy saw Max with Lucas she'd been upset. They were always arguing. He didn't know about what, Max would always lie when he asked. Billy wanted to throttle the kid. Where the hell did he get off making Max cry?

Max rolled her eyes and threw her head back against the seat with a sigh. "I don't care about what Neil wants."

"Yeah well...you should."

Max turned to her brother, narrowing her eyes. "Why don't you just leave? You're 18. Why do you put up with it?"

"You know why." Billy said evenly. And Max did. Neither of them had ever spoken about it out loud. If Billy left, then Max and Susan would be the new targets of Neil's rage. He'd seen it before. Neil had never been nice to Billy, but he hadn't started hurting him until it was just the two of them. Just because you removed yourself from Neil's life didn't mean that he would stop. He would just move on to whoever was next in line.

So unless Susan finally saw the light and left Neil, which Billy and Max doubted would ever happen, Billy would stay and make sure Max didn't grow up the same way that he had. And in a way he was grateful for Teddi. Maybe Teddi hadn't always known what was going on in the Hargrove/Mayfield household, but she hadn't hesitated to take Max under her wing. Teddi was there for Max in a way that he couldn't allow himself to be. If things ever got bad at home Billy knew he could drop Max off at the arcade and Teddi would be there to cheer her up and talk about horror movies and...whatever the hell zodiac signs were. He still wasn't entirely sure. But still, Teddi was kind of Max *and* Billy's saving grace.

And he had probably fucked all of that up.

Teddi had pretty much been on autopilot for the rest of the night. She didn't know why she felt so anxious about what had happened with Billy. It wasn't like he would tell anyone. Maybe because now she would have to admit out loud that her life was nowhere near as great as she wanted people to think. There was also this sick feeling in her stomach that was building at the thought of Billy having to go through the same things she went through. And *Max*. Was Neil hurting Max? Susan? Did Susan even *know* that it was happening?

It definitely explained a lot. Why Billy was always so angry. There had been a time when Teddi had felt that way. Angry at the world. Living in an abusive household could *very* easily make you feel like no one cared about you. But Teddi knew that Max cared about Billy. No matter how much she would deny it. Teddi even cared about Billy to *some* extent. He didn't *need* to be so angry.

When she arrived back home she could see the lights were still on inside. She let out a heavy sigh before heading in and seeing that both of her parents were awake and watching tv together in a rare occurrence. "Hey..." she said quietly, hanging her coat up by the door.

"Your mother and I are going to a New Year's party tomorrow night at the Harrington's." Her dad announced as if on cue. Of course they were. She knew that her mom wouldn't pass up any form of social event. Teddi stood awkwardly at the end of the living room and nodded, hoping to slowly inch her way down the hall to her bedroom without having to have too much conversation.

Her mother was *beaming* for the first time since they had moved to Hawkins. "It was a personal invitation. Just after your father got a huge promotion at work. It's a corporate job with the mall. He'll even be working closely with the mayor." Teddi could see the look of pride on her father's face that matched the same look he'd had back when he'd gotten his big promotion in New York. It was a very rare to see any expression on his face that wasn't his usual clenched jaw and glare. While Teddi didn't care that her father had gotten the promotion, there was a tiny sliver of hope that meant he'd go back to pretending she didn't exist like he had back in New York.

"Oh...well, that's great! Um, Steve actually invited me to a bonfire tomorrow..."

"You're not going." Her father said firmly.

Teddi frowned. "What? Why? It's just a party-"

"Maybe if you had *asked* I would have let you. You're not going to come into *my* house and tell me that you're going out."

"I wasn't telling you that I was going out," Teddi argued. "I *never* go out-"

Her father scoffed. "You think I don't know that you went out somewhere last week? That you didn't come home because you were out whoring around town like you did back in New York? I'm not going to let you embarrass me here, Theodora. You're not going to that party. Now go to your room,"

Teddi visibly deflated and turned to leave. There was no point in arguing. She'd escape to the safety of her room, lick her emotional wounds and be grateful things hadn't gone worse. "And if your mother tells me *one more time* that you came home smelling like cigarettes, I'll have to refresh your memory on why you quit in the first place."

Teddi didn't turn to look at him. She walked as quickly as she could to her bedroom and tried her hardest not to slam the door shut behind her. "Five more months..." she reminded herself, letting out a shaky breath. Her eyes were stinging with the threat of tears.

Back when Teddi did smoke she was sure that her parents hadn't known. She went out of her way to keep the smell off of her and hiding her cigarettes. But her mom had a habit of going through Teddi's room when she was bored, and she had shown her dad the pack of cigarettes that she'd found. So he lit one, grabbed Teddi by the arm and put it out in the inside of her bicep. Teddi hadn't picked up another cigarette until she'd met Billy.

Teddi also wasn't incredibly upset about having to miss the bonfire. Initially her plans were to do exactly what her father had demanded

from her. It was more so the principle of the thing. He was going out of his way to control her and keep her from any small piece of happiness she could find in this stupid town.

She would let herself cry tonight. To feel sorry for herself. But she would be going to that party. Her parents weren't going to control her anymore. She was going to find a way out. And fast.

12. Chapter 12

A/N: Don't worry everyone, no one's gonna be getting flayed at the steel mill. Well, not yet anyways.

xxx

Sneaking out of the house had at one point been Teddi's specialty. Back in New York she had snuck out to go to parties, go on dates or just to get out of the house so often that climbing out of her bedroom window had basically become a muscle memory. It was different now that she was in Hawkins. Her parents were more miserable and focused in on whatever it was that she was up to. But tonight would be different. Tonight would be like the old days. The Harringtons had invited her parents to their New Year's Eve party, and Teddi knew that her mom and dad would be the last ones to leave sometime around dawn if the party really ended up to be as wild as Steve had described. "Last year Carol's mom got so wasted she threw up in the pool and then locked herself in my parent's bathroom for like...three hours." he had said.

Steve Harrington had the same knack for sneaking out (and technically *in* when it came to sneaking into Nancy Wheeler's bedroom while they had been together) that Teddi had. When Teddi had called the next morning to tell him the very cleaned up version of what had happened between her and her parents the night before he had gone into super sneak mode. Technically speaking it hadn't been their *best* plan. After her shift was over for the night Teddi would drive home, Steve would follow her and park across the street until her parents left for their party and they would be off. They had decided that they would ditch their bonfire at one in order to get Teddi home well before her parents and they would be none the wiser to what she had been up to.

Teddi had put on an entire act. She came home, mumbled a hello to her parents, and headed to her room to remove her makeup and change into pjs to help with the illusion that she'd be staying in for the night. When her parents left completely dressed to the nines, Teddi was planted on the couch with a can of Coke and a bowl of popcorn. "We'll be home late." was all her father said before shutting

the front door loudly behind him. Teddi sprung into action. She ran back to her bedroom, quickly changing out of her pjs and into her outfit for the night. The cold had finally caught up to her. Instead of the usual mini skirt or pair of cut off shorts, Teddi pulled on a pair of high waisted, black jeans and a bright, yellow chenille sweater. She kicked on her boots and grabbed her puffy jacket and was out the front door and rushing over to Steve's car.

"Come on, come on, come on," Steve said, hitting his hand against the steering wheel. Teddi slid into the passenger's seat and the pair shared a high five. "That was like record time, Larsson!" he said as he took off down the street. The way that Steve called Teddi by her last time was much more...*soft* than the way Billy did.

"Not my first rodeo," she laughed out as she tried to catch her breath. She was a little rusty, but she had still been impressed with how quickly she'd gotten ready. "So this isn't gonna be a problem with the party? 'Cause my parents are hoping for a rager."

"Oh, totally. My mom looks forward to it every year. It's the biggest party in Hawkins...according to her at least." Teddi had never met Steve's parents, but from the way Steve spoke about them she was sure that they would be *great* friends with her parents. And if that meant they'd be out of the house more often then Teddi was more than fine with it.

"So, where's this steel mill at?"

"It's like maybe twenty minutes out of town. It's been abandoned for a few years. Tommy usually has parties there when nobody has folks that are out of town." and by twenty minutes out of Hawkins, Steve may as well have said the steel mill was in the middle of nowhere. There was *nothing* around. He mentioned there was a sort of shitty motel that had been turned into apartments a few miles up the road, but that was about it until you got to the next town over. Teddi was sure that Hawkins was quite possibly the most boring town in America.

When they arrived at the steel mill, Teddi noticed that there weren't nearly as many cars as there had been at David's Christmas party. The steel mill was also pretty creepy. Scratch that; *very* creepy. It

definitely looked abandoned. The "Brimborn Steel Works" sign was so old and faded that Teddi could barely read it in the dark. She could hear the party and see a faint glow from the bonfire coming from inside, but the way that the music and voices echoed off of the old building gave Teddi a bad feeling. At least there was a payphone nearby in case some Jason Voorhees character tried to kill them all.

"Is this *safe*?" she asked, carefully following Steve across the gravel.

"Uhhh...sure. I mean no one's died yet." she wasn't really sure if he was teasing her or not. Once they made their way inside, Teddi was immediately met with the smell of the bonfire and beer. There were a few empty and broken bottles strewn around, as well as a group of three kegs all sitting in a frothy pile of spilled beer next to a cooler. The music was coming from a boombox that was sitting up safely on an abandoned machine.

She recognized more people at this party. Heather, Freddy and Katie were all there and waved at Teddi when they saw her. Robin Buckley, a girl that Teddi was sort of friendly with and shared three classes with, was with a group of her friends. Tommy H and Carol were being the loud, obnoxious hosts of the party. They were entertaining a large group of people closest to the fire with some sort of drinking game.

And then there was Billy. He was by Tommy and Carol's group, but somehow still off on his own. He was leaning up against a railing with a beer bottle hanging between his fingers and a cigarette between his lips. The cold must have finally gotten to him like it had Teddi; he had traded in his usual button up shirt and leather jacket for a *very* tight white henley and a denim shirt layered under his jean jacket. He also looked very, *very* bored.

As if he knew that Teddi was watching him, Billy's eyes met hers. He watched her coolly for a moment as she moved across the large room and over to the coolers, taking a swig of his beer before his eyes drifted over to Steve who was beside her. If he felt any sort of way about the two arriving together he didn't show it.

"Want a beer?" Steve asked, holding up two bottles. Teddi nodded enthusiastically before grabbing the beer and taking a large swig.

Why had she come to this party? Of course Billy was going to show up. And while the last couple of weeks had been filled with nothing but trying to *avoid* Billy, that almost felt wrong now. There was this big, screaming secret between the both of them that was impossible for her to ignore. But it seemed like Billy was going to try his damndest to pretend it wasn't there.

"Well, well!" Teddi nearly groaned at the sound of Tommy's voice. "Look what we have here!" Tommy and Carol had turned towards Teddi and Steve, the pair looking at them with nearly identical evil grins. "Billy wasn't enough for ya, huh, Teddi? Moving on to Harrington? You've been a busy girl!"

Teddi wasn't scared of Tommy or Carol. It was obvious to her that they were both extremely insecure with the way that they both dropped Steve for Billy the moment he showed up in Hawkins. At one point back in New York Teddi had been Tommy and Carol. The big bad popular girl at school that looked down her nose at people. But now she pitied the both of them if anything. "Gee Tommy, if you were this worried about your *own* sex life as you are mine then Carol wouldn't always be hitting on your friends." she said with a slight nod to Billy. It was *no* secret how badly Carol wanted Billy. As soon as Tommy was out of sight, without fail, she would shamelessly flirt with Billy even though he'd never shown even the slightest interest.

Carol shifted uncomfortably beside Tommy, who was watching Teddi with narrowed eyes. Finally he smirked. "Oh yeah? And what's after Steve then, Teddi? You gonna want a round with me too?"

Teddi rolled her eyes. "No thanks. I have enough disappointment in my life." Tommy glared at her as a few of their friends tried to hide their laughter.

Steve held a hand up. "Alright, Tommy. I think that's enough, huh? We're all just trying to have a good time."

Tommy quickly turned his attention from Teddi to Steve. "No one's stopping you, Harrington. How's it feel to settle for someone else's scraps? Is she the best you can do after that prude Nancy left you for Byers? God, I hope you're putting out, Teddi. Stevie boy's gotta be *real* hard up after putting up with that priss-"

"Tommy, how about you shut the fuck up for once, huh?" heads turned at the sound of Billy's voice. He didn't say anything else, only flicked the butt of his cigarette away and took another drink. Tommy looked like Billy had slapped him.

Tommy looked between Billy and Teddi a few times. "Are you going *soft*, Hargrove? Over some lousy lay? What, are you and Steve double teaming her?" he laughed.

"Pretty sure Carol's the one that's into that sorta thing." Billy said evenly.

"You piece of *shit*-" Tommy spat, moving quickly towards Billy. But of course Billy didn't back down. He matched Tommy's strides, but Teddi stepped in before anything more could happen.

"Billy, *stop*. I don't need your help." her tone was a little pleading. She really didn't want to see Billy do the same thing to Tommy that he had done to Steve a few months back. Especially with so many people around to witness it. That wasn't something Billy would ever be able to come back from. Teddi could practically hear Billy's ego shatter at her words.

"C'mon, Tommy," Carol said with an over dramatic eye roll. She grabbed Tommy by the arm and gave him a tug. "It's your turn on the keg. Let them have their little *lovers quarrel*." she said with a pointed look towards Steve and Teddi. This was enough to appease an already drunk Tommy much to Teddi's relief.

"What the *fuck* was that?" Billy spat.

"Hey, hey. Back off, dude." Steve took a step in front of Teddi, holding a hand out to stop Billy from coming any further.

"Get your hand off me, Harrington. Unless you want a replay of that beating I already gave you." Billy took a step towards Steve, his shoulders held high.

Teddi wiggled her way around Steve and placed herself between the two. "What are you, *cavemen*? Steve, it's fine okay? Just give me five minutes," Steve eyed Teddi for a moment before shooting Billy a

warning look and walking off. "What was *what*, Billy?" she asked with a tired sigh.

"I don't get you, Larsson. You're always telling me what an asshole I am, and I try and stick up for you and you *embarrass* me."

"Because I don't need you to stick up for me!" Teddi threw her hands up. "And frankly I'm a little surprised you give a shit after how you acted at the arcade." she crossed her arms.

"How *I* acted?" Billy asked with a dry laugh. "Teddi, you're such a goddamn pain in the ass sometimes-"

"*Likewise!*" she snapped. Teddi couldn't believe how *stupid* she felt to think she could go out for the night and have fun. "You're just so...ugh." she spun around and stomped off. She had had more than enough of Billy Hargrove for the night.

Steve caught up to her as she continued to put distance between herself and Billy. "Teddi, are you okay? If you wanna get out of here-"

Teddi shook her head. "I'm fine, Steve. I'm just gonna step outside for a sec, okay?" she lied, sidestepping Steve and heading outside into the cold night air. She wanted to go *home*. It of course occurred to her that walking home was possibly the dumbest thing that she could do, but she'd had more than enough testosterone for the night. She had been walking for about ten minutes before she heard the rumble of the Camaro's engine.

Billy pulled up beside her, leaning forward to get a better look at her. "The hell are you doing, Larsson?" he asked.

"I'm walking home." she said, wrapping her arms around her in an attempt to keep warm. Billy coasted along beside her as she continued on down the road.

"You're gonna freeze to death!" he argued. Teddi ignored him. "Teddi, get in the car."

"No."

"Larsson, I will pull over and *put* you in the car," and Teddi definitely

believed that. He'd picked her up like a ragdoll enough times for her to know better than to keep arguing. With a loud huff Teddi yanked the door open and got into the Camaro. They were both silent for a few very long and awkward moments. "Does Harrington know you ran off?" he finally asked.

Teddi crossed her arms. "...He thinks I'm getting some fresh air." she muttered. She felt bad now for lying to Steve, but she was sure that if she called him the next morning and explained he wouldn't be *too* upset with her.

Billy let out a short chuckle before going silent for another few moments. "...So, what, are you pissed at me for last night?" while Teddi was known to give him the cold shoulder after one of his outbursts, she usually got over it pretty quickly. Billy figured that he must have hit a nerve. It didn't make him feel *good* to know he had upset her so much by confronting Teddi with the truth. At least it was all out in the open now. He wouldn't need to dance around the subject anymore. It made things awkward in a different way than it had been before, but somehow this was better.

"No...I don't know," Teddi sighed. Her steely exterior was now gone and replaced with a glimpse of her usual bubbly self. "I think I'm more embarrassed now that you know about it if anything. I've been keeping it a secret for so long I didn't expect anyone to ever *know*..."

Billy shifted uncomfortably. "Yeah, well, I guess it's hard to keep a secret from someone who's dealing with the same shit." more silence followed.

Teddi was chewing on her bottom lip as she looked over at Billy carefully. "...Does he hurt Max?"

"No. There's been a few times where it's come close..." those times were starting to become more frequent. Billy wasn't entirely sure what happened that night at the Byers' place. After Max jammed that needle in his neck he had blacked out and had somehow managed to make it back into his own room a few hours later. Max didn't talk about it, but Billy knew that she and her friends had run into *something* that made her see Neil as an insignificant threat. "She doesn't get it. You know, one day I'm not gonna be there...Susan's too

afraid of him to do anything." Billy was gripping onto the steering wheel tightly.

Teddi supposed she could understand how Billy could rationalize the way he was with Max. "Tough Love". But it was much heavier on the tough part than the love. And things needed to change. Fast. "You can't keep treating her like this, Billy," Teddi said shaking her head. "This whole scared straight thing you have going on. It's not any better than what our dads do to us, even if the intention is different. You have to show her that you actually give a shit about her."

She expected him to flip out on her. To start screaming at her and telling her that she didn't know anything about him or what went on at home. Instead he just looked over at her coolly. "And why's that?" he asked.

"Because otherwise she'll end up like you." Billy knew that Teddi wasn't trying to insult him. He wouldn't admit that she was right though either. But she was. Neil had ruled over their household with an iron fist, and it had done nothing but turn Billy into an angry and violent guy that no one wanted to be around. And yeah, Billy's intentions with Max were different. He didn't want her to grow up afraid like he had. He wanted her to grow a thick skin. But his approach was the same as Neil's. He guessed it was a good thing that Max seemed to be a hell of a lot more brave than he had ever been.

"...I'm sorry about Tommy." he said instead.

Teddi raised her eyebrows at the comment. "I'm sorry" was a phrase she didn't think was in his vocabulary. "Tommy's an insecure idiot with a tiny dick. I don't really care about what he has to say," she cracked a smile when Billy laughed. "Besides, it's not anything I didn't hear back home in school or from my dad." she shrugged.

Billy quirked an eyebrow. "Your dad?"

"He used to call me the town bicycle," Teddi rolled her eyes. "I used to be a lot...*friendlier*, and we lived in this snobby, tiny neighborhood where everyone gossiped."

Billy nearly slammed down on the breaks. "You?" he asked with a

laugh. "No way, Larsson."

Teddi sunk in her seat a little and scrunched her nose. "Oooh yeah. I was like...the *worst*. I was always out partying, getting in trouble, sleeping with like...anyone that was interested. I'm pretty sure that's why I keep putting up with your shit so often. I used to be like *you*." she teased.

This wasn't the first time Teddi had given Billy a glimpse into her wild past. Even still, he had a hard time imagining it. Teddi was this bubbly, talkative, *nice* girl. She wasn't anything like him. "I'm not so sure I can picture something like that, Weird Girl."

"And why not? Even Max says that I'm super cool." she joked.

Billy grinned and shrugged. "You're...you know. A nice person or whatever."

Teddi's jaw dropped as she turned to face Billy. "Was that a genuine compliment I just heard from you, Billy Hargrove?"

He groaned. "Don't make such a big deal out of it. I can have my moments."

Teddi smiled, tilting her head as she watched him squirm uncomfortably in his seat. "...Do you think you're not a nice person?" she asked.

"I don't exactly hear it very often."

"True...but you could be. Anything's possible. You could try like...taking a nap or something." she joked. But she meant what she said. If Billy was willing to put in the work he could be a guy that everyone liked. Max had said that she'd seen a change in her brother. Teddi even saw a change every once and awhile when Billy would let his guard down. Especially after tonight when he stood up for her.

Billy let out a soft snort. "Yeah, I'll get right on that," the Camaro turned onto Teddi's street. "Jesus, Larsson, you could walk to my place from here."

"Does that mean you're gonna want to hang out more? You wanna

finally play Dungeons and Dragons?" she asked, perking up.

"I'd rather be locked in a closet with Carol." he deadpanned. Teddi rolled her eyes. Billy pulled into Teddi's driveway and put the Camaro in park. "Well, there you go Cinderella. Back home before midnight."

Teddi let out a small laugh and groan. "God, Hawkins is lame...thanks for the ride, Billy."

Billy grinned widely. "Oh, you know I'm always down to give you a ride, Larsson." he definitely didn't miss the way she blushed at the comment before she let out a loud scoff.

"Oh my god. *Goodnight, Billy.*" she muttered quickly before sliding out of the car and rushing to the front door. Billy watched as she fished her keys out of one of her jacket's pockets and slipping inside before he started to slowly pulled out of the driveway. He could probably go back to the party. He had about an hour left before he had to pick up Max from the Wheeler's place. And he definitely didn't want to sit out in the driveway like some kind of lame asshole.

But the door swung open and Teddi poked her head out. "Yo, Hargrove! You wanna come watch some New Year's Rockin' Eve?"

Billy drummed his fingers on the steering wheel for a few moments while he thought it over. His curfew was at one (thanks to Susan convincing Neil to go to the Harrington's party) and he had nowhere else to be. So he pulled back into the driveway, shut the Camaro off and got out. He shoved his hands into his pockets and awkwardly made his way up to Teddi. "Don't try and get fresh with me, Larsson." he said, cracking a grin. Teddi laughed and rolled her eyes before stepping aside to let him in.

"In your dreams, Hargrove."

13. Chapter 13

A/N: We have a Hopper appearance! He might start to pop up a bit more along with Steve. I haven't quite decided yet. But we're finally past Billy's bullshit for now! Yay!

xxx

School was back in session. Teddi's life was now *drastically* different than it had been two and a half weeks ago. People were of course talking about what happened at the New Year's bonfire. The story differed depending on who you asked. Some people would say that Teddi and Billy had started this wild love affair and that Tommy was trying to steal Teddi away. Some said Billy had tried to actually kill Steve when he showed up with Teddi. Her favorite so far was that quite a few people thought Billy and Carol were sleeping together behind Tommy's back, Teddi was dating Steve to make Billy jealous and they had run out of the party together and driven off out of state to get married. She had said plenty about how boring Hawkins was, but Teddi had to admit the gossip was a hell of a lot more wild.

Billy ended up staying at Teddi's until the ball drop at midnight. Mostly he complained about all of the musical acts on TV until Teddi got him to admit that Shout by Tears for Fears wasn't actually *that* horrible of a song. Soon after he left to go pick up Max, and Teddi climbed into bed. Her parents had come home sometime in the middle of the night just like Steve had said they would, much to her relief. She couldn't imagine what might have happened if they had decided to come home early and saw Billy there.

Teddi called Steve the next day and apologized for ditching. And after a very long lecture about how there's "like serial killers and shit out there, Teddi" Steve finally let it go. Of course she appreciated that Steve looked out for her, but ever since he started hanging around Dustin he had become almost overly protective. And the gang teased him constantly about it. They called him "mother hen" much to Teddi's delight.

But now Teddi was stuck in gym. And she hated gym on a good day. Adding in girls giving her dirty looks and whispering behind her back

about Billy of all people made her want to blow her brains out. Both the girl's and boy's classes were stuck inside for the day. The coaches had decided it was still too cold for any outside sports, so it was the little miracles Teddi guessed. The boys were all playing basketball while the girls were running laps.

Teddi had given up after about four trips around the large gym and was perched on the bleachers praying for time to move faster. "Larsson, this is pathetic." Teddi gave Billy a tired look. Of course Billy lived for gym. He'd had his shirt off before the coach had even gotten "We're playing shirts and skins, boys!" out. Teddi had been watching him practically asserting his dominance over every other guy on the court, all while gloating over the fact that all the girls were stopping to drool over his sweat covered body.

Now he was over at the bleachers, tossing a towel over his shoulder before he crossed his arms and gave her a mocking look of disappointment. "Gym is pathetic. I'm not built for physical activity like you are. I think I'd literally kill someone to be out back smoking. I don't care if I freeze," she complained. They were both very aware of the eyes on them. The hushed voices of the girls that jogged past them. Teddi rolled her eyes. "Your groupies *hate* me now by the way. I'm definitely not gonna be 'that one nice girl everyone sorta likes' anymore thanks to you."

Billy smirked, glancing behind him and throwing a wink at the group of girls watching him. He turned back to Teddi with a grin. "That 'cause we're married now?"

Teddi laughed. "You heard that one too, huh?"

"That and I heard I banged you *and* Carol right in front of Tommy," he said. Teddi groaned and covered her face. "Give it a week, Larsson. They'll have something else to obsess over by then." Teddi knew he was right, but she still dreaded having to deal with the dirty looks for however long it took for the focus to move off of her.

"Teddi Larsson!" Teddi groaned again at the sound of the girls' coach, coach Greene, calling her from across the gym.

"Kill me. Please kill me. I'm begging you." she mumbled into her

hands. Billy laughed, turning to watch as coach Greene made her way over.

"What do you think you're doing, Teddi? I said you girls have to run laps. Not flirt with the boys." she shot Billy a dirty look. He flashed her that charming smile of his, not moving an inch. Teddi wanted to slap him.

"Coach Greene, I just don't think that running laps is very conducive to my energy. I have a lot of stress on my shoulders what with making good grades and getting into a good college so that I can become a productive member of society and all." Teddi explained. Billy laughed again, quickly covering it with a cough when coach Greene turned to glare at him.

"Teddi, if you don't run laps I can't let you pass gym. And if you don't pass gym then you won't get into college. So get your skinny butt up and let's hit it, Missy."

"...I'm like 120% positive that that's a complete lie." Teddi said bluntly.

Coach Greene crossed her arms. "You either run the laps, or you have detention."

"Oh, I have a choice?" Teddi asked. "I totally choose detention."

Her answer had clearly thrown the coach for a loop. She opened and closed her mouth a few times before her jaw set tightly. "*Fine*. And *you*," she turned and jabbed a finger in Billy's direction. "Shouldn't you be over there?" she asked, nodding to the basketball court.

"Coach says we're on a water break," he said with an overly sweet smile. Coach Greene looked at the both of them before letting out a heavy sigh and stomping off. "Detention," Billy clicked. "I'm disappointed in you, Teddi."

"I'm not. That means peace and quiet to finish my homework *and* no running. I say this is a win/win for Teddi." she said with a triumphant smile.

Billy shook his head. "Whatever you say, Weird Girl. Just try to stop

staring at my ass so hard once I get back out there." he tossed his towel at Teddi who let out a loud "*ugh!*"

"I'm pretty sure I'm the only girl in here that's *not* staring at your ass, Billy." she argued. That wasn't *completely* true. She had maybe caught herself looking once. But could anyone really blame her?

"Uh-huh. Just try and not get into anymore trouble, Teddi." he teased before heading back to his game. Teddi was sort of amazed at how her relationship with Billy had nearly done a 180 since the bonfire. They still harassed each other sure, but now it was in a more playful way rather than a mortal enemies sort of way. They hadn't fought either...well, unless you count the time that Billy told her she was never *ever* allowed in the Camaro again if she asked if he had any Bon Jovi cassettes.

It wasn't a perfect transition or anything. He was still *Billy* after all. He mouthed off a lot and he and Max still bickered, but there was a difference. He was trying, and that's all that Teddi could ask for. There still wasn't any luck with getting him to play Dungeons and Dragons much to her disappointment. She'd wear him down eventually. It was a talent of hers.

And as surprised as Teddi was with the fact, Billy was a pretty good friend. Something between them had finally clicked. So when Teddi found herself in detention a few hours later she couldn't say she was entirely surprised to see Billy saunter in. "And you tell *me* to stay out of trouble?" she asked with a raised eyebrow as he made his way over to her.

He plopped down into the desk next to her. "I'm not. I'm here for a jail break." he folded his hands and placed them behind his head as he leaned back.

"What? No. I'm doing my homework...well, *trying*. Plus, they'll totally kill me if I leave early." Teddi had been stuck on the same math problem for the last twenty minutes and she was *this* close to throwing her text book across the classroom.

Billy leaned over and scanned her notebook. He pointed to the question. "It's twenty six," he said coolly. "And this is *Hawkins*, Ted. No

one's gonna give a shit if you skip out. Do you see anyone in here anyways?" he asked, looking around the empty classroom. "Trust me, I've been here plenty of times to know that they're not really running a tight ship."

Teddi blinked at him a few times before shaking her head. She plugged Billy's answer into the problem and let out a loud huff. "Are you telling me that you're secretly smart on top of everything else?"

Billy grinned. "Don't tell anyone. I got a reputation to uphold. Now come on, Larsson," he slid out of the desk and began walking off without even looking back at Teddi. She started muttering as she tried to grab her books and backpack as quickly as she could. "So, what are you gonna tell your parents about the detention slip?" he asked, nodding to the pink slip of paper in Teddi's hands.

Teddi rolled her eyes. "I'm forging my mom's signature. You think I'm gonna actually tell them I had detention?" Teddi had learned to forge her mother's signature in the fifth grade. After she came home with a bad grade on a math test and her dad's head had practically spun around she learned it was better to keep things like this from them. Plus, it wasn't like they cared enough to ever show up to an open house at school or anything.

"By the way, I should be thanking you." Billy said as the pair made their way through the halls.

Teddi frowned over at him. "*Thanking me?* For what?"

"Cheryl Burns heard what happened at the bonfire. She was *all* over me today after gym." he grinned. Teddi rolled her eyes and Billy's grin turned into a glare. "*What?*"

"She ditched you to go bone Brian Jean, remember? Don't you think you should date someone that won't cheat on you every time she's easily distracted by pretty boys?"

Billy scoffed. "We're *not* dating."

"You've been out with her like a handful of times. I bet if you ask her she'll say you're dating. I mean, in her own Cheryl Burns sorta way."

on paper Teddi supposed that Billy and Cheryl were perfect for each other. Cheryl was gorgeous in a way that almost made you think she didn't belong in a place like Hawkins. Just like Billy. The two stuck out like sore thumbs. But then the fact that neither of them could keep it in their pants added on top of everything else was a recipe for disaster.

"What is it with chicks and wanting to tie guys down?" Billy asked.

"...I'm gonna ignore that generalization and say that she probably wants the whole school to know that your *hers*. Like an alpha female sorta thing. So if you don't wanna *date* her you should probably stop *doing* her...or at least have a talk. Personally, if I were you I wouldn't date someone that was so similar to you when it comes to...matters of the flesh." Billy's sex life was the last thing Teddi wanted to talk about, but if they were going to be friends it was something she'd probably have to get used to. As much as it irritated her.

"Matters of the flesh?" Billy said with a snort. "Is that Weird Girl lingo for fucking?"

Teddi could practically feel her cheeks burn as she blushed. "I mean, I wouldn't put it so bluntly personally," she chose to ignore the way Billy was smirking with her. "Look, just maybe put some thought into this is all I'm saying. Your dick isn't gonna fall off if you stop using it, *trust me*."

"Are we speaking from experience, Larsson? Been awhile?" Billy teased.

It wasn't that sex was a topic Teddi was embarrassed of speaking about. She definitely wasn't. She just didn't need it to live in the same way that Billy seemed to. "Ugh...*maybe*. And no, I'm not telling you how long. I already told you I'm swearing off dating until college...maybe after college."

Billy shook his head as they both emerged out into the school parking lot. Teddi could see her van parked next to Billy's Camaro, and Max was waiting impatiently next to her brother's car with her skateboard in her arms. "Your funeral, Teddi." he shrugged. She ignored that comment too.

"What took you guys so long?" Max asked, throwing her head back in annoyance.

"Teddi got detention." Billy said with a taunting grin.

Max raised an eyebrow as she watched Teddi throw her backpack into the back of her van. "*You* got detention? No way." she laughed.

"Gym class is *barbaric*. Besides, he broke me out. He's even more of a delinquent than I am." she pointed an accusing finger at Billy.

"Well we all know that already. Can we go now? Will's supposed to help me with my math homework."

Teddi sent a sweet smile in Billy's direction. "You could always ask Billy for help."

Max let out a snort. "Yeah, I'll believe that when I see it."

Billy sent them both unamused looks. "Just get in the damn car, wise guy."

Teddi snickered and threw a wave over her shoulder. "I'll see you guys later!" she called before making her way around to the drivers' side of the van. Billy had pulled out of his parking spot and was nearly out of the lot before Teddi could even turn her car on. She shook her head and slowly backed out of her parking space and headed off for the arcade.

Billy and Max would most likely be in later that night. The past few times they'd come in Billy had stuck around to annoy Teddi and try his hand at a few of the games. Keith had already warned him that if he kicked any more of the machines because he lost that he'd be banned for life. Teddi was *never* going to let him live that down.

Things were still slow when she got to the arcade. There were only a handful of kids around, and Keith was behind the prize counter with an issue of Fangoria. "Chief Hopper's looking for you." he said, barely looking up from his magazine.

Teddi frowned. "What the hell does he want with me?" she asked as she made her way around the counter.

"No clue. He's next door waiting for you. You and Billy knock over a 7/11 or something?"

Teddi rolled her eyes. "You're so funny." she said before disappearing into the back room. She'd be lying if she didn't feel anxious at the idea that Hopper was looking for her. She hadn't done anything wrong. Had something happened with her dad at work? Was he okay? Teddi struggled to change into her Palace Arcade shirt as the countless possibilities ran through her mind. It was probably something as simple as he needed help picking out a movie to rent for El and him to watch. Nothing to worry about. Hopefully.

"Try not to get locked up. I still need help around here." Keith said once she walked back out into the arcade. Teddi stuck her tongue out at him before heading over to the video store. Chief Hopper was waiting for her at the counter. It wasn't completely unusual to see him there. He came into the video store pretty often to rent westerns for El and him to watch on the weekends, but once Teddi saw the expression on his face she was pretty positive that that wasn't the reason he was there.

"Hey, Chief. Keith said you were looking for me? Is everything okay...?" she asked.

Hopper gave Teddi a small smile before looking over both shoulders to make sure no one else was listening to them. He let out an uneasy sigh before placing both of his hands on the counter. It did nothing to ease Teddi's anxiety. "Look, kid...I don't usually get into people's business," he began, letting out another sigh. "But a few weeks ago Joyce mentioned to me that you came into Melvald's with a black eye. And she told me you said you slipped on ice, but she was worried that maybe something *else* was going on," Teddi could feel her heart beating faster and faster.

Hop was quiet for a moment as he thought of what to say next. "Before I adopted El, things were pretty...*rough* for her. But she's always been good at reading people. So when *she* came home after sleeping over at Max's and told me she's noticed some things with you that seemed a little *unusual* I figured maybe I should ask you about how things are at home." Teddi was honestly a little surprised at the concern in Hopper's eyes.

"Oh..." was all Teddi could say at first. Clearly she hadn't been hiding things as well as she thought. Or maybe Billy had been right. It's hard to keep a secret from someone that's keeping a similar secret themselves. Maybe this was finally her way out. Maybe she could just fess up to everything. Hopper would help. She knew that he would. But still...it seemed like too much trouble. "Um, no. *No*. Everything's totally fine. I mean, honestly between how much I work and my dad works none of us see each other."

Hopper watched her for a few moments before he nodded. "Alright...but if you ever need anything or need to talk the station's right down the street." he offered.

Teddi nodded and offered him the best smile she could manage. "Definitely. *Thank you*. Um, is there anything else? There's a few more Eastwood flicks El hasn't seen." she offered, glad to change the subject.

"Nah...well, actually I guess it couldn't hurt. Better than those soap operas she likes to watch." Hopper rolled his eyes.

Teddi laughed and nodded. "I'll be right back," she ducked out from behind the counter and disappeared for a few moments before coming back with two tapes. "Eastwood and *this* is another one that I think she'll really like." she slid the tapes over to Hopper.

He picked it up, flipping the case over to inspect it. "The Last Unicorn?" he asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Uh-huh. She said she wanted to learn more about mages, and I'm sure that Will and Mike are doing a pretty okay job of explaining, but this is probably a little more entertaining for her. And it's based on a book too. She mentioned you guys both like to read."

Hopper nodded as he read the back of the case. "Ah sure, what the hell, right? Thanks, Teddi...and remember, just down the street, okay?"

"You got it Hop. I'll see you on Wednesday." Hopper gave a small wave before leaving, and Teddi left out a heavy sigh. That was it. Maybe it was time to move out before her last five months were up.

There was that apartment building that Steve mentioned on the night of the bonfire. Maybe she could look into that and be out as soon as that coming weekend.

She briefly wondered if she should say something to Billy. If people were figuring out that her home life wasn't all too great, it would only be a matter of time before they started noticing the same for him. But even if she did bring it up, Teddi was pretty positive Billy wouldn't leave with Max still stuck at home with Neil. So she'd leave it alone. She'd look up the address in the phone book and find some time to check it out later that week. It was a scary feeling, the idea of being on her own. But then technically Teddi had sort of *always* been on her own.

A couple of hours later Keith poked his head into the video store's door. "Teddi, your boyfriend's here." Teddi looked up to see Billy's Camaro pulling into the parking lot. "I'll take over here. You make sure he doesn't abuse any of my machines."

Teddi rolled her eyes. "He's *not* my boyfriend. And stop worrying. Your precious machines will be safe in my hands." she said, patting Keith on the shoulder and walking out to meet Billy. *Okay*, she thought to herself as Billy and Max both made their way over towards the arcade, *maybe I'm not completely on my own*.

14. Chapter 14

A/N: Alright so it turns out writing about Billy having feelings other than angst is pretty tough. But you know, we're finally making progress on the romance front. Enjoy

xxx

Teddi ended up chickening out over calling about the apartment. It had been about a week or so since Hopper had come into the video store, and the idea of living off on her own was still constantly on her mind. If only she could just *make* herself call. Instead she could only trace the phone number that she had written on the back of one of her notebooks. She hadn't brought it up with Billy either. He would've been supportive of the idea, Teddi knew he would. She didn't have any siblings to worry about like he did. No strings tying her to her family. And she could already practically hear him joking about her apartment being the new party spot. Like she'd let that happen. But there was this part of her that worried that he might think the whole thing was stupid. That he might tell her she was running from her problems or being a baby. So for now she would keep it to herself.

Now Teddi was in the library during her free period, mindlessly tracing that same phone number as she chewed on her lip. Initially she'd decided to use her free period to finish up on some homework before she had to go to work, but her mind was much, *much* too busy to focus on any math homework she had. In fact, she was so spaced out that she didn't even notice that someone was walking up behind her.

"What's that?" Teddi jumped at the sound of Steve's voice.

She held a hand to her chest, glaring up at him as he pulled the seat across from her out and plopped down. "It's nothing." she said a little too quickly.

Steve raised an eyebrow. "...That definitely doesn't sound suspicious," he grinned. "Come on, Ted. It's me, *Steve*, you can tell me. You got a boyfriend you're keeping a secret or something?"

Teddi rolled her eyes. "Nothing so scandalous," she joked. She supposed there was no real harm in telling Steve. He was a much more impartial party compared to Billy. "...You know that apartment building you told me about at the New Year's party? The one out by the steel mill? I've kinda been thinking of moving there. Like getting out on my own and all." she eyed Steve nervously while she waited for his reaction.

"Pfft, I sure wish I could move out," was all he said. "My old man's constantly down my neck about what I'm gonna do after school. Like I'm supposed to have any idea." he scoffed.

Teddi let out a small breath of relief and smiled. "You don't have any colleges lined up?"

"Uh, well I was trying to pick out a few to apply to...but then I couldn't really decide on any...and then I kinda missed all the deadlines to apply," he nodded, flashing a sheepish grin. "What about you? I mean, you've gotta have schools trying to kick down your door, right?"

College. That was another subject that Teddi wanted to avoid. She'd been busting her ass working two jobs and making sure her grades were nothing short of amazing so that she could make sure to get into a good school...but there wasn't really anything she dreaded more. And she was completely aware that it didn't make a lick of sense. "Well, actually I got into NYU which was like...my *dream* school...but I don't really know if I'm gonna go if I'm completely honest."

Steve's eyebrows shot upwards and he grinned. "Wait, what? Teddi, that's amazing! Why wouldn't you want to go there? I'm pretty sure Johnathan Byers would kill you just to take your place."

Teddi let out a snort before shrugging. "I don't know...I know it sounds dumb. Trust me. I've just been wondering lately if I actually *want* to go to college or if I'm just doing it because it's what people our age are supposed to do, you know? Or if it's just like an excuse for me to get out on my own. And I feel like I finally have actual *friends* here now and I'm up and leaving. It kinda bums me out." there was also the added fact that she had absolutely no idea what she would major in. She didn't like admitting to people that her life

wasn't as put together as they might think.

Steve shot Teddi a knowing look before leaning forwards. "Please tell me this isn't about Billy Hargrove."

Teddi scoffed, sinking down in her seat. "Oh *please*, Steve." sure Billy was part of it. Of course he was part of it. Teddi was as close with Billy as she was with Steve, maybe even more so now. Which was ironic since they had been sort of mortal enemies, but it wasn't *solely* about him.

"What's the deal with him anyways? You can't honestly be falling for this whole 'nice guy' act he's been pulling lately, can you?" Teddi could definitely understand Steve's skepticism. After all, he was the guy that Billy had beaten unconscious just four months ago. At the same time though Teddi had a hard time imagining that the Billy she knew *now* could ever do something like that.

"Look, I know that he's not exactly Mr. Rogers," Teddi said. Steve let out a snort. "But he's really a lot different now. It's like a 180...well, maybe more like a 150. We're not completely there yet. I think if you two can get over your weird alpha male thing you have going you could probably even be friends," Steve only shot her a disbelieving look. "If *I* can be friends with him then so can you. You're friends with Johnathan Byers now, aren't you?"

Steve held up his hands. "Yeah, yeah. Look, I'll take your word for it. I mean I don't think me and him are gonna be hanging out any time soon...I just want you to be careful. If Billy really is trying to not be such a shit head then *great*. But just...keep an eye out."

Teddi would be lying if she said she didn't have her own reservations about Billy's behavior. There was this tiny part of her that wondered if maybe it was all some sort of an act. Like Billy might be pretending to be a genuinely nice guy to get in her pants. But she always brushed it off. She wanted to have more faith in him than that. And she definitely wasn't going to voice her paranoia out loud. "Yes, mother hen." was all she said instead, grinning at Steve.

Steve rolled his eyes. "Cute. Really cute. Hey, do you have the notes from history?"

"You mean you didn't take any?" Teddi asked with a smile as she started to search through her backpack for her notes.

"...Oh, totally. I just wanted to compare them with mine."

Teddi let out a snort. "Uh-huh...shit. I don't have my binder. I think I left it in my gym locker. I'll be right back, okay?" Steve threw her a thumbs up before Teddi rushed out of the library.

xxx

Billy usually liked to spend his free period in the gym. It always got quiet after gym class ended, and maybe aside from a few girls that liked to sit on the bleachers while he practiced his free throws no one really bothered him. Teddi had asked if he wanted to join her in the library while she finished up some homework. He'd said that he'd rather chew off his own foot than voluntarily step foot in the school library.

There was also the fact that there was *something* that was bothering her and she actually seemed to think she could hide it from him. Teddi was somewhat of a shitty liar. Or at least he was really good at seeing through it when she lied. He wasn't really sure which it was. Probably the latter. The bigger issue was that he had asked if there was something going on and she *kept* lying. So he had dropped the issue. But he also definitely didn't want to sit around for a whole hour while she dodged his questions and acted like everything was perfect and told him to stop being so pouty.

"Billy!" someone called just as he gracefully tossed the basketball into the basket. Billy turned, trying his very hardest not to roll his eyes when he spotted Cheryl leaning up against the bleachers. The small group of girls sitting a few feet away didn't bother to hide the dirty looks they were shooting in her direction.

He had been trying to avoid her for the last week or so. Teddi had been right; Cheryl Burns made him downright miserable. But ignoring a girl like Cheryl was proving to be pretty difficult. She didn't really like to take no for an answer. Which he found pretty annoying. Just two days ago he had turned her down for a night out at the drive in, and yet there she was wagging those long, red nails at

him beckoning him over like it had never happened.

Billy let out a soft huff and jogged over to her, nodding once at her. He wasn't going to try and charm her like he did with every other girl he spoke to. It would just give her the wrong idea. Cheryl bit her bottom lip, smiling up at him as she batted her eyelashes at him. "You busy?" she asked, tilting her head to the side. Her hands rested just barely at his sides.

Billy looked at her and back out to the basketball court. "...What does it look like to you, Cheryl?"

She playfully rolled her eyes. "I need to talk to you for a sec." she reached out and took one of Billy's hands in hers and pulled him towards her.

He pulled away. "Can we do this some other time? Like I said, I'm busy."

Cheryl definitely wasn't the sort of girl that got turned down often. Billy wouldn't really be surprised to find out he was the first to do so. There was a moment where the sweet, seductive look Cheryl was giving him turned into one of annoyance and he hoped that it meant she would throw a fit and stomp out of the gym and leave him alone.

He wasn't so lucky. "And I said that I need to talk to you." she nearly spat through her teeth.

Billy rolled his eyes. "*Fine*. Talk."

The seductive smile was back just as fast as it had disappeared. Cheryl happily took his hand in hers once again and pulled him out of the gym and into the hall. Whatever it was that she had to say, she clearly didn't want to do it in front of an audience. She lead him two doors down to the girl's locker room. Cheryl did a quick scan of the room to make sure they were alone before she spun around, giving Billy a soft shove against a row of one of the lockers and kissing him roughly.

Billy's hands instinctively went to Cheryl's waist before his conscience (which he was annoyed to realize seemed to sound a *lot* like Teddi's

voice) told him to stop. His hands moved to Cheryl's shoulders and he pushed her away gently. He smirked down at her, raising an eyebrow. "I thought you said you wanted to talk?"

Cheryl blinked up at him innocently, or as innocently as a girl like Cheryl could manage, and ran her hands down his bare chest before resting on his stomach. "Did I say that?" she all but giggled. Billy supposed he should have seen this coming. It was definitely a trick *he* would try to pull. He knew that he needed to get out before he did something he'd regret later. He was pissed at Cheryl. He didn't even *like* Cheryl. So why was he sticking around? *Christ*, he thought, *don't pull on that thread.*

"Cheryl, if you want someone to fool around with how 'bout you go find that moron Brian Jean?" he asked with an expectant look. After Christmas break ended Billy had offered to kick the shit out Brian for ditching Teddi to hook up with Cheryl at David's party. Teddi had practically forbidden him, but that didn't mean Billy wasn't allowed to fuck with him. And he definitely hadn't missed the pleased look on Teddi's face a few days earlier when Billy "accidentally" happened to brush his keys down the entire side of Brian's shitty little Chevette.

Cheryl rolled her eyes. "Are you honestly still mad about that? That was *forever* ago, Billy. I didn't even think you'd care," *Yeah, that's the problem*, he thought with a scoff. Cheryl's hands snaked around his neck, pulling him down closer to her. "Come on, Billy, let me make it up to you." she purred. Billy liked to think of himself as a strong guy. That he wasn't swayed easily no matter what the situation was. But as annoying as he found Cheryl Burns, there was something about her that seemed to short circuit his brain. The shorter, more simple answer was that it was probably because she looked like the girls in his Playboys.

Everything after that was sort of a blur. He wasn't sure how long he had been there with Cheryl. The bell hadn't rung yet. That was really all he was able to discern. Billy had turned the pair of them around, pushing Cheryl's back up against the lockers. His hands had a firm grip on her ass while her hands were tangled in his hair, her long tails scratching gently at his scalp. He hadn't really thought much of the situation until he heard the locker room door open and a very familiar voice say "Oh, jeez. *Sorry*. Jeez. Uh I just...my locker..."

Billy spun around. Teddi was standing by the door with a hand over her eyes. He felt his stomach drop. Cheryl scoffed. "Can we help you?" she asked, glaring daggers at Teddi.

"I, uh, gotta get something out of my locker is all...and then go and die from embarrassment." she muttered. Teddi rushed passed Billy and Cheryl and disappeared for a moment. Billy heard her locker open and close before Teddi nearly bolted out of the room. He quickly followed after her, ignoring Cheryl's protests.

"Teddi! Teddi, can you fucking slow down?" he called, jogging to catch up with her quick strides. He grabbed her arm to stop her and spun her around to face him. She refused to make eye contact with him. He wanted to say something. His brain was screaming at him to say *something* to her. But he couldn't seem to get anything out. "...I'm sorry." was all he could manage.

Teddi still wouldn't look him in the eyes. "Sorry?" she still sounded surprised to hear him use that word. "What's there for you sorry about?"

"I mean..." he turned and gestured back towards the locker room awkwardly. "What just happened. Cheryl said she wanted to talk and then all the sudden-" *all the sudden what?* He asked himself. *Teddi caught you fooling around with the same girl you said you were gonna stop fooling around with? Idiot.*

"You really don't have to apologize. *Really.* I just needed some history notes. I'll see you around, okay?" Billy didn't think he'd ever seen Teddi so frazzled before. Everything about her at that moment was so unlike the Teddi he knew. He was a little surprised she didn't give him an earful about how he needs to stop seeing Cheryl and leading her on. Now it just seemed like she would rather be anywhere that wasn't near him. His jaw set firmly. "Don't do that." he didn't let go of her arm.

"Don't do *what?*" she asked with a loud sigh.

"Don't act like nothing happened. Where's the lecture?" he asked, leaning down so his eyes would meet hers. "You don't have anything to say to me? No *matters of the flesh* comments?" he hated how angry

he sounded. He was angry with himself, not Teddi.

"Billy..." Teddi's eyes were pleading. He felt bad all over again. He dropped her arm quickly as if it had burned him. "...I'll see you later." she muttered. All he could really do now was helplessly watch as Teddi nearly ran down the hall and away from him and the locker room.

"God, what is taking you so long?" Billy's hands clenched into fists at the sound of Cheryl's voice. He whirled around to see her poking her head out of the locker room. "Are you coming back in here or what?"

"*Fuck off, Cheryl.*" he spat, stomping past her and back to the gym. This whole being nice thing was definitely stressing him out more than he expected it to. He actually felt embarrassed. Embarrassed that he had been caught doing something so completely stupid. Embarrassed that he cared so much about how upset Teddi seemed by the whole thing. And it was definitely embarrassing to admit to himself that he knew *why* he cared so much. It wasn't a secret that he was into Teddi. He definitely hit on her enough. But it was a little more than that.

He couldn't even say the words in his mind. That he *liked* Teddi. Something like that seemed so pathetic to say out loud. Not to mention it would get him nowhere. Teddi had turned him down enough times to know he didn't stand a chance with her. Still, the feeling he'd gotten when he saw that she'd walked in on him and Cheryl was that same feeling he'd had when he'd walked into the Palace Arcade before New Year's and saw Teddi talking to Steve.

It made that familiar anger bubble inside of him, but in a different way. He was angry at *himself*. He felt pathetic. Practically pining over some girl. Maybe that was part of why he kept Cheryl hanging on. She was a way to momentarily forget about any sort of feelings he might have. Which was also pretty pathetic.

There was also the option of just saying something. To stop acting like such a little bitch about it. *Yeah*, he thought with a scoff, *I think I'd rather let Max hit me in the dick with that bat than do that.* He shoved the gym door open and grabbed his bag before heading back to the locker room for a shower. At the very least they'd have to talk

about *this*. He completely dreaded the idea. He was sure Teddi was dreading it too. But this whole ignoring each other any time shit got tough thing was getting old.

But he underestimated Teddi. When she didn't want to talk to someone, she meant it. He hadn't seen even a glimpse of her for the rest of the day. He'd even skipped out on his last period early to catch her in the parking lot. When he got there her van was already gone. When he dropped Max off at the arcade he asked Keith if she was around, and he'd said she was off on her break. Billy still wasn't sure if he was telling the truth or covering for her.

He felt a little panicked then. Like finally he had gone and *really* fucked up. Maybe now Teddi wouldn't want anything to do with him anymore. Maybe he had gone and chased off the one friend he had in Hawkins. To say he was angry with himself was an understatement. He thought about calling, but quickly brushed the idea aside. He'd give her her space. She'd come to him when she was ready to talk. The only problem now was trying not to go absolutely insane while he waited for that to happen.

15. Chapter 15

A/N: This is a little bit of a filler plot, but there is some more ground work being laid out for a future plot line. I told you guys Teddi's dad would be important! And in about three more chapters some *big* stuff is gonna be happening. Enjoy!

xxx

It was late. Teddi had come home from the arcade a few hours ago and she was trying her damndest to sleep. There was just too much on her mind. Even more so now. When she had come home her parents had been awake and waiting for her. Immediately she started panicking that she was in trouble. That they had found out that she'd snuck out on New Year's, or that she had had Billy over or that she'd gotten detention. But her mom seemed too happy. Which was almost even more confusing.

Apparently with her father's new promotion to the mayor's office came a big raise. And so now her parents wanted to move to the nicer side of Hawkins. Three doors down from the Harrington's, in fact. It wasn't much of a discussion either. They were moving and that was that. Teddi shouldn't have been that surprised. This had happened before in New York. Her dad had his shitty construction job, he'd gotten his promotion, and he moved the family into this flashy house upstate. But the fact that this was happening again and so soon really weirded Teddi out. There was *something* going on, she just couldn't figure out what.

Then there was also the Billy situation. Walking in on him and Cheryl. She really didn't like to think about it. Anytime she did she got that weird fluttery feeling in her stomach that she hated. Eventually she realized that she also felt a little jealous. It was impossible *not* to have a crush on Billy. Even with his bad attitude. She'd had one since the moment he'd walked into the video store for the first time almost a month ago. Had it really only been a *month*? It almost felt like she'd been hanging out with Billy for years.

Teddi let out a huff, turning over in bed and staring up at the little glow in the dark stars that she'd stuck to her ceiling. Billy. There was

probably some alternate universe out there where everything was different the two of them were dating. There was a chemistry there. She felt comfortable around him. She knew her cheeks got all warm any time he would flirt with her. But that was the thing. Billy flirted with *everyone*. And he didn't date. And Teddi wasn't really up for random hookups in the girl's locker room with someone she wasn't dating. It was like all of the puzzle pieces were there, but they couldn't seem to make them fit together.

She felt badly about avoiding him. It was the same thing that he was constantly doing that drove her crazy. But she just didn't want to deal with that problem right now. Not with everything else going on. So she skipped her last period all together so she could avoid a run in with him in the parking lot after school. And when she was at work and she heard the rumble of the Camaro's engine she ran to hide in the break room and told Keith to cover for her (which he had gotten a *big* kick out of). But now with the news her parents had dropped on her, Billy was the only person she wanted to talk to.

The red numbers of her alarm clock were flashing 12:26 AM. It was a Friday night. There was a chance that he was home and still awake. Or out at the lake, probably with Cheryl. Teddi let out a sigh. She threw her covers aside and grabbed her boots and her puffy coat and gracefully slid her window open and out and into the snow. Billy's house was about a two minute walk from hers. Shorter if she hurried like she was tonight to get out of the cold.

There was a light on in his bedroom. Thank god. It was dim, but Teddi took it as a good sign. She felt a little badly for dropping in unannounced. But at least he was alone. Teddi peered into his window to see Billy lounged out on his bed with a Playboy in hand. She rolled her eyes and knocked on the window. Billy jumped slightly, his eyes widening a little when he spotted Teddi. He tossed the magazine aside and crawled over to the window before opening it for her.

"Reading the articles?" she asked.

Billy rolled his eyes. "The hell are you doing here?" okay, so he seemed a little annoyed with her. She could understand that. But he was letting her in. That's what mattered. Teddi expertly crawled into

his room, much more easily than she had when she had been drunk, and plopped down onto his bed.

"I couldn't sleep." she said simply. Billy moved back to his original spot on his bed and crossed his arms. If this had been any other day this situation would feel totally normal. Hanging out in Billy's room while they listened to music, Neil and Susan none the wiser. But now Teddi was super aware that she was alone with Billy on his bed. And all she could think about was walking in on him kissing Cheryl Burns.

Billy watched Teddi fidgeting nervously at the end of the bed. So much so that it was starting to make *him* feel nervous. He scratched the back of his neck. "...Is everything okay?" he asked her warily.

"I'm moving." she all but blurted out.

Billy's eyebrows raised in surprise. Moving? Back to New York? Teddi had only been in Hawkins for a couple of months and now suddenly they were up and leaving? "...What do you mean you're moving? Where are you moving to?" he asked with a frown. He felt that anger bubbling back. Like when Neil and Susan had announced they were moving to Hawkins. That one shred of happiness was being ripped away from him yet again.

Teddi fiddled with the end of the t-shirt she'd been wearing to bed. "Apparently Steve and I are gonna be neighbors."

Billy let out a soft, relieved laugh. "Jesus. Is that all, Weird Girl? I thought something *bad* was happening." he was pretty sure Teddi was the only person that could think moving to the yuppie side of town could be a bad thing.

Teddi let out a groan and fell backwards onto the bed. "You don't get it," she huffed. "There's something *weird* going on here with my dad. This is *exactly* what happened in New York when I was little. The construction job, the promotion, getting all cozy with the mayor. It's all too similar to be a coincidence, you know?" she paused. "...You think maybe he's doing something illegal?" she asked, looking over at Billy.

"Are you asking me if I think there's some sorta secret mob activity

going on in that tacky ass mall they're building? I'm gonna have to say no," Teddi only pursed her lips. Billy chuckled. "I think you're just being a little too paranoid there, Nancy Drew." he teased. And he was probably right. Teddi had read one too many mystery novels growing up and if was starting to get to her. That was all.

The two fell into a somewhat comfortable silence before Billy finally spoke up. "How come you've been avoiding me all day?" and just like earlier today, Teddi was back to avoiding eye contact with him. She hadn't really been expecting him to bring it up honestly. When she didn't answer Billy let out a heavy sigh. "Look, I know that I said I'd stop messing around with Cheryl-"

Teddi shook her head and turned to face him. "No, no. Look, you're a big boy. You're allowed to date or *whatever* with whoever you want, okay? I just want you to be with someone that makes you *happy*. And Cheryl only seems to make you happy for...you know...a couple of minutes." she said with a small giggle.

Billy had to admit he felt a little disappointed by her answer. He'd sort of been hoping Teddi would admit the whole thing had made her feel just a little jealous or something. If *she* initiated things between him it didn't make him pathetic or weak, right? Instead he smirked down at her. "Oh trust me, it's a lot longer than a couple of minutes."

Teddi felt her cheeks grow hot as she smiled, biting down on her lip. "Whatever, Hargrove. You know what I mean," Billy couldn't help but laugh at the sound of Teddi's giggle. "...What do you think you're gonna do after school?" she suddenly asked, propping her head up on her hand.

"What, you mean like college?" Billy asked with a scoff. College definitely wasn't for him. He hadn't put enough effort into his school work to get into any decent school on top of the fact that the idea was completely unappealing aside from the parties.

"Not necessarily," Teddi shrugged. "Like...in a perfect world, if you could do anything you wanted once you graduate, what would you do?"

He didn't even need to think about it. "I'd go back to California."

"Really?" she asked. "Even if you could go anywhere in the whole world?"

"In a heartbeat," he nodded. "I'd give anything to go back." Teddi didn't miss the longing look in Billy's eyes as he thought of home. She was a little jealous. Sure, she missed New York and the city, but it was clear she didn't miss it anywhere near as much as Billy missed California. You could see the home sickness all over his face.

Teddi smiled softly at him. "What do you think you miss the most?" she asked.

"The beach," it was clear there was no contest. "I used to spend all my time down there. Me and my friends would have bonfires. *Real ones*. Not like the ones they have here in that shitty steel mill. I had this spot under the boardwalk where I'd bring girls," he smirked. Teddi smiled and rolled her eyes. "And I'd go surfing. There was always something to do back home. Even if my dad was being a dick and locked my car in the garage. It's not like here."

Teddi sat up. "*You* went surfing? Big, bad Billy Hargrove?" part of her could picture it. She could see that California surfer boy hidden under all the winter clothes. She could picture his hair a few shades lighter from the sun. She could notice the slowly fading tan. But at the same time, Billy Hargrove on a surfboard might have been something that she needed to see to believe.

"I was the *best*," that signature cocky grin of his was back. He leaned back against the wall and smiled. "I can't wait 'til I get to see the ocean again. Once I leave Hawkins I'm *never* coming back."

"Maybe I'll go to California one day," Teddi mused. "I've never even seen the ocean."

"Wait, what?" Billy's eyes widened and he shook his head almost like he had misheard her. "How is that even fucking possible?"

Teddi laughed softly. "I lived upstate! It was practically just...yuppie Hawkins. I've actually only ever been to New York and Hawkins. We never took family vacations or anything." There had been a lake a few miles from her house that had what was probably the closest

thing to a beach she'd ever been to. It had really small patches of sand and a dock that all the kids liked to jump off of. But she knew it wasn't anything close to a *real* beach.

Billy scoffed again. "You're definitely going to California."

"Oh, so we're going together now?"

"It's not like you have anything else planned." on the surface it sounded like some other sassy comment of his. But the fact that Billy was offering to take Teddi back to San Diego, to the place he clearly loved most on Earth, spoke volumes for how far they had come. Teddi almost wanted to pinch herself to make sure this wasn't all just a dream.

"...Do you believe in fate?" Teddi asked after a small moment of silence.

Billy rolled his eyes. "Oh, here we go..."

Teddi playfully slapped his leg. "I'm *serious*. Do you?"

Billy was quiet, mulling the question over for a bit before he finally shook his head. "No. 'Cause life's way too fucking depressing." he muttered. He reached over to his nightstand and grabbed his pack of cigarettes.

"I mean...*true*," Teddi said with a sigh. "But don't you think you and I becoming friends is like...weird? Like the universe meddling in our lives sort of weird?" Billy only raised an eyebrow as he took a drag of his cigarette. Teddi turned to face him, crossing her legs and holding up her hands. "Okay like listen, aside from the...*depressing* similarities in our lives. We're totally different people, you know? Like, I wonder if there's some sort of cosmic reason behind all of this."

Billy watched Teddi with an amused look. Sure, it was unusual that he'd ever become friends with someone like Teddi. She liked all of that nerdy shit that Max and her friends liked and he hated. But it wasn't *that* weird.

"How can it be so weird if we're sister signs?" he asked with a grin.

Teddi blinked wildly. "Wha- how do you know we're sister signs?"

"You told me when you were drunk."

She grumbled. "...That sounds like something I'd do."

Billy chuckled and shook his head. "You wanna know what I think?" he asked.

Teddi gave him an unamused look. "That I watch too many movies?" she asked.

He grinned. "Bingo," Teddi visibly deflated at his comment. "Alright, alright. Let's say for argument's sake that you're right. What would the big cosmic reason be?" he asked.

Teddi thought for a moment. "...I don't know," she huffed. Billy let out a snort. "What if we're supposed to figure out whatever shady business my dad's been up to or something?"

"What are we, the Scooby Gang now?" he asked with a laugh.

"I have the van already," Teddi grinned. "All we need is a dog."

"Not sure if I'm committed enough for a dog just yet," he joked. He held out his cigarette in offering to Tedd. She shook her head.

"Can't. My dad shit a fit the other night. My mom told him I came home smelling like smoke." she said with an eye roll.

Billy knew that whatever happened hadn't been as casual as she was trying to convey. She had told him that things had calmed down at home ever since her dad's promotion. But Billy also knew that guys like their dads could still be unpredictable. Teddi had told him that Chief Hopper had come into the video store about a week before to ask her if things were okay at home. He got why she lied, really he did. But he wished that she would fess up. She seemed pretty sure that a guy like Hopper would actually *help*. And the world wouldn't really be missing out if a guy like Greg Larsson was locked up.

But he wouldn't pry. Neither of them ever pried. "...Everything okay?" he asked.

Teddi shrugged and rolled her eyes. "Just the same usual shit. Nothing I can't handle." and that was that. They would drop the subject.

"You workin' tomorrow?" he asked, putting his cigarette out in the nearly full ashtray on his nightstand.

Teddi shot him a knowing look. "What do you think?"

Billy pulled a face. "I mean at the arcade. Neil and Susan are going off for some work conference of his or something and I'm stuck with Max. She wanted to rent some movies and have that El girl over again and I am *not* dealing with a sleepover on my own."

"So are you asking me to come over and help you control girl's night?" she asked with a pleased looking smile.

He rolled his eyes. "Yes, Teddi. You in?"

She smiled and nodded. "I'm in. It's my night off from the arcade, but I gotta work at the pool tomorrow afternoon. I'll call you after my shift. I should probably go though and at least *try* to sleep," she grumbled. She crawled over to the window, glaring back at Billy. "And no staring at my ass while I climb out."

Billy smirked, placing his hands behind his head. "I make no promises, Larsson."

Teddi rolled her eyes and muttered out an "ass" before crawling out the window (Billy *definitely* checked out her ass) and quietly sliding it shut behind her. Billy's smirk faded a little. Christ was he in deep.

16. Chapter 16

A/N: We're gonna see good ol' Brian Jean in this chapter! Here's a bit of fun fluff because the next chapter is gonna be rough :)

xxx

Working at the Hawkins public pool really wasn't that bad of a job. It was at this awkward point in time between Christmas break and the weather finally becoming warm, so there really weren't too many people around aside from the occasional swim class. Teddi had been able to take on her own class finally. Every Saturday morning she taught a group of five year olds the basics, albeit not with the same instant success as Billy.

Her class had ended about half an hour before. A few of the kids were still splashing around in the shallow end while they waited for their parents to pick them up, and Teddi was perched up in the lifeguard's chair waiting for her shift to come to an end. Then she could swing by her house and change, rent some movies from the video store and head over to Billy's to help him with Max's sleepover. All in all a pretty laid back day.

She noticed Brian Jean walking in. She ignored him. He was just there to pick up his brother, and he'd be out of her hair once again. Teddi didn't feel any real resentment towards Brian. She hadn't even wanted to go on that date in the first place. If anything she was more annoyed with Cheryl for ditching Billy to screw around with Brian. She didn't really *like* Brian though. It was easy to see now that his whole nice guy act was just that: an act.

Teddi supposed Billy was a bit guilty of the same thing. He'd put on the charm whenever a cute girl was around. But the way Brian did it was a bit more...sinister somehow. Billy wasn't really as unassuming as Brian was. Or maybe she was just mad that she hadn't been able to see through it herself. She didn't know. Billy was more upset than she had been about the whole thing. Once they got back to school Billy was nearly constantly trying to pick at Brian to get on his last nerve.

"I'm supposed to let him fuck with you and get away with it?" he had

asked. "It'll be fine, Ted. He's a *soccer player*. I'm not afraid of him." but it was more than that. Teddi didn't want to Billy to solve all his (or her) problems with his fists. If he'd gotten in trouble for fighting it would've been a lot more than just being sent to detention where he could sneak out and no one would be any the wiser. He'd get suspended. And that would mean Neil finding out. And Teddi was *not* gonna be responsible for Billy having to deal with Neil over something so pointless.

Eventually he let it go after she had to actually forbid him from doing anything. Of course not after he keyed Brian's car while they were in the parking lot after school waiting for Max. While Teddi definitely didn't *approve* of it, she had to admit it had been pretty funny.

Unfortunately Brian still seemed pretty interested in her regardless of her attempts to ignore him. He was honestly starting to make her feel a little uneasy. He was just *sitting there* on the bleachers looking at her. *God, just take your brother and go, **freak***, she thought. Teddi turned slightly in her seat in an attempt to get rid of the creepy feeling she had. She could maybe call Freddy over and tell him what had happened. He'd definitely kick Brian out. But that seemed so silly. She would just ignore him.

She let out a loud sigh of relief when she saw Katie headed her way. "Happy to see me?" she asked Teddi with a laugh.

Teddi climbed down from her chair. "You have *no* idea. I gotta get outta here. I'll see ya later, Katie!" she threw a wave over her shoulder and nearly bolted for the locker room. She made quick work of changing. She could grab a quick shower at home. Whatever it took to make sure she could get out before Brian could corner her again.

Unfortunately that plan didn't work out. "Uh, hey Teddi..." Teddi rolled her eyes, but didn't stop as she walked past Brian. He followed after her. "C'mon, Teddi. Can I just talk to you for a second?" he asked.

"Fuck off, Brian."

"I'm sorry about the party, okay? I was a dick. Can't you give me

another chance? Maybe we can get together for Valentine's Day or something." he offered.

Teddi stopped and turned towards Brian before she let out a heavy sigh. "Look, I know this might be hard for your tiny brain to process, but I'm not interested. I was *never* interested. I was just being nice. And you rewarded me by screwing my friend's date and abandoning me. So, *no*. I don't want to do anything for Valentine's Day. I don't want anything to do with you at all. So *leave. Me. Alone.*"

When Teddi said that Brian was dumb, she meant it. He was clearly incapable of reading very obvious signs. As Teddi turned once again to leave, Brian grabbed her by the arm. "I'm not done talking to you!" He pleaded.

Teddi wasn't a violent person. She really wasn't. She'd told Billy time and time again that violence wasn't the answer. If anything this was her father's fault. Brian grabbing her arm with the amount of force that he had sent a jolt of fear through her. It triggered her fight or flight senses immediately. But Brian wasn't her father. She could fight back. So Teddi whirled around and sent her fist flying upwards towards Brian's nose with as much force as she could manage. There was a sickeningly satisfying crack.

Brian let out a yowl and his hands flew up to his nose. "You bitch! You broke my nose!"

Teddi couldn't help but let out a laugh. She pressed her lips together and covered her mouth to keep herself quiet. "I told you to leave me alone." she said with a shrug and a smile. She didn't care that *everyone* at the pool had seen. He deserved it. A few of the moms were watching in shock as Brian dabbed at his bloody nose, groaning and moaning to himself. Katie was stifling her laughter up on her chair and Freddy was at a loss of what to do. Teddi took that as her sign to leave.

She held her composure until she was safely in her van. "Jesus Christ." she muttered, shaking her fist rapidly to try and get rid of the stinging feeling in her knuckles. The skin was red and irritated and she was sure that it would probably bruise. As bad as she may have felt for hitting Brian, she couldn't lie and say it hadn't felt a *little*

nice. It would definitely get him off of her back from now on.

She just had to hope that she wouldn't lose her job over it.

xxx

"Max, do you have to listen to that shit so loud?" Billy asked, shoving her bedroom door open. Neil and Susan had left about an hour before. Now Max and El were jumping on her bed, hair brushes in hand as they sang along to Total Eclipse of the Heart. He wanted to blow his brains out.

The pair stopped jumping almost simultaneously and looked at him. "What's wrong with Bonnie Tyler?" Max asked.

El grinned. "Probably reminds him of Teddi." she teased, her and Max falling into a fit of laughter.

Billy let out a groan. "Just turn it off. Or *I'll* turn it off." he warned, turning and stomping back down the hall towards the living room. The stereo shut off and the sounds of the two giggling girls quickly following after him filled the house.

"When's she coming over anyways?" Max asked. "Did she get the movies? Did she say what she got? Is this like a date or something? We can go hang out in my room if it is."

Billy ran a frustrated hand over his face. He didn't think there was anything in the world more annoying than teenage girls. "*I don't know*, Max. She just said that she'd be here after work. And it's not a date. Can you two shut up with that already?" the two looked at each other and giggled almost as if they had shared some joke telepathically.

It was starting to get dark out. Teddi probably should've been there a few hours ago. He figured that it probably had something to do with what happened at the pool. Freddy had called him a little earlier to tell him. "Dude, you will not believe what happened. Teddi *totally* decked Brian Jean!"

Billy had only felt proud for someone that wasn't himself twice in his life. The first was Max. He worked hard to make sure Max had a thick

she wouldn't take shit from *anyone*. And sometimes he thought it could be a little too thick. But that night at the Byers' after he'd woken up back at home with bits and pieces of the night's events coming back to him he could help but feel a little proud of the way she had stood up to him to protect her friends. He could have gone without her threatening to turn his dick into mush, but he was still proud.

He was definitely proud of Teddi. She was always so passive when it came to...well, anyone that wasn't him. Always avoiding confrontation. And he understood it. It was an easier route to take at home. But when Freddy called him to say that Teddi had broken Brian's nose he felt a huge wave of pride.

The doorbell rang, and Max jumped up to answer the door. Teddi was finally here. She had bags from Melvald's and Hawkins Family Video hanging on her arm and she was balancing three pizza boxes in her hands. "Hey, Maxamillion! The party's here!" Billy got up to help her with the pizzas as she handed the bags to Max. "There's our movies and some candy. Mrs. Byers told me to tell you guys she said hi."

Max and El both made quick work of dumping the bag of candy onto the floor in front of the tv as Billy and Teddi went into the kitchen. "So," Billy began with a smirk. "How was work?"

Teddi froze for a brief moment. "...It was fine." she said with a shrug.

Billy set the pizzas on the counter, leaning against it and grinning over at her. "Really? Nothing interesting happened?"

Teddi's eyes narrowed and she crossed her arms. "...What do you know?"

"*Everything*. Freddy called me about twenty minutes ago," Teddi groaned. "Is that why you wanted me to stay away from Brian? You wanted to handle it yourself?" he asked in a teasing tone.

"No," Teddi sighed. Billy watched as she fidgeted nervously in front of him. "I was just gonna ignore him, but then he *grabbed* me and...I don't know. I think I might be wound a little tighter than I've

realized."

Billy held his hands up. "Wait, wait. He grabbed you? What do you mean he grabbed you?" the next time Billy saw Brian he'd have a hell of a lot more than a broken nose.

"I thought Freddy told you everything?" she asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Apparently not. Why the hell would he grab you?"

Teddi let out another loud sigh and hopped up onto the counter. Her legs swung back and forth slowly as she picked at the hole in the knee of her jeans. "It's not as bad as it sounds. He kept trying to ask me out so he could make up for the party. Something about Valentine's Day," Billy let out a snort and rolled his eyes. "But I told him I didn't want to and he wasn't taking *fuck off* for an answer..." she covered her face with her hands and let out a loud groan. "I just wish I hadn't decked him in front of everyone."

Billy scoffed. "I wish you had done a lot more than that. Too bad I wasn't there to see it, though. I bet it was pretty hot." he smirked.

Teddi bit down on her lip to keep herself from smiling. "You're a bad influence, Hargrove."

"You know it, Baby." he grinned.

Teddi's cheeks flushed a little before she hopped down from the counter and walked over to the pizzas. "I'm *starving*. I got a cheese for the girls and I got us two pepperonis since you put away food like a bottomless pit." she teased.

Billy held up an arm, flexing and patting his bicep. He relished the way Teddi's blush grew deeper. "Gotta feed the machine."

She laughed. "The machine? Do you ever hear yourself? Oh, who am I kidding? I bet you *love* to hear yourself talk." she giggled, sticking her tongue out at him and grabbing a slice of pizza.

His response was cut off by Max poking her head into the kitchen. "Can you guys stop flirting for two seconds so we can watch the

movies? This is so boring."

"Max..." Billy began.

She rolled her eyes. "Yeah, yeah, I know. *Shut up, Max.*" she said in a mocking tone before disappearing into the living room. Teddi only smiled at Billy before she piled two more slices of pizza onto her plate and followed Max.

"Alright, so since El isn't a big horror fan I picked up *Midnight Madness* and *Splash*," Teddi announced. "And don't even think about complaining, Hargrove. It's three against one. Ladies night means we watch *Splash*."

Billy groaned loudly and dramatically as he flopped down onto the couch. He'd rather tear his own eyes out than watch some chick flick. He'd sat through a few on dates, but it was a small price to pay to get to feel up whatever girl he'd taken out that week in the theater. And that definitely wasn't gonna be happening with Teddi. Especially with the gruesome twosome around.

If he was honest El was probably his favorite out of Max's friends. He still didn't trust Lucas completely and Mike and Dustin annoyed the shit out of him. The Byers kid was okay. But there was something about him that gave Billy the creeps. El was quiet for the most part. She didn't talk back like Mike always was (even though he was constantly trying to weasel rides all around town from him) and she wasn't always babbling incessantly about all that weird nerd shit they all liked.

Still, Billy would've preferred it if the two of them weren't there so he could try to put the moves on Teddi. *Yeah, like that would work anyways*, he thought bitterly. If all his flirting so far hadn't worked, he definitely doubted that whole yawn and stretch trick would work on her like it did the other girls. So instead he crossed his arms firmly across his chest and pouted. He only moved to light up a smoke halfway through *Midnight Madness*.

That hadn't been such a bad movie. He'd gotten a few laughs. He'd also caught Teddi watching him a few times whenever she knew a funny scene was coming up to see if he'd laugh or not. She almost

looked proud each time he did. Like she had his approval.

Splash however...was a nightmare. God did he hate it. But he wasn't surprised Teddi had picked it out. Some idiot finds a mermaid and falls in love with her. It had *Weird Girl* written all over it. They were about halfway through the movie when he finally complained. "This movie sucks," he spat, a cigarette between his teeth. He lit it and tossed his lighter onto the coffee table. "You can't even see anything! What's the point of having her topless the whole damn movie if they're gonna just cover her up?"

Teddi scoffed and gave his arm a soft shove. "Of course she's not naked! There's impressionable eyes in the room." she said, like it was the most obvious thing in the world. Billy grumbled loudly.

Max turned to face the two of them with a smirk. "Yeah, Billy. Save your nudie movies for when it's just the two of you." she and El fell into a fit of giggles. Billy glared at the back of Max's head. He grabbed a handful of the popcorn Teddi had made in between the two movies and threw it at the back of his step sister's head. She only laughed.

He glanced over at Teddi. She was trying not to laugh herself. But her cheeks were flushed. She patted Billy on the shoulder. "It's almost over," she promised. There had only been about a half hour left. To Billy it had felt like ages. Max cracking jokes about how John Candy's character was gonna be Billy in about twenty years definitely didn't help either. When it was finally over Teddi stretched and fell back into the couch. Her head lolled over to look at Billy. The corner of his lips turned upwards. She smiled back at him.

"...I should get home," she sighed. "I told my mom I was working an extra shift at the arcade. I don't want her getting suspicious."

Max and El whirled around. "What? You just got here!" Max complained.

"Max has board games!" El argued.

Teddi let out a whine like groan and scrunched up her nose. "Believe me girls, if I could sleep over I would. Maybe next time, okay? I'll

bring more chick flicks." she grinned over at Billy. He rolled his eyes.

"How 'bout you guys clean all this shit up, huh? And tell Teddi thank you for the movies." *God*, he thought with a hint of disgust, *I sound like Neil*. Max and El both said their thank yous, hugging Teddi before running off into the kitchen with the remnants of popcorn and pizza.

Teddi returned both tapes to their cases and smiled over at Billy. "You gonna be able to handle them on your own?"

"Maybe...maybe I'll sneak some nighttime cough syrup into their Cokes," Teddi shot him a look and he waved a hand at her. "I'm kidding...thanks for this. Coming over and all." he shifted nervously, his hands in his pockets.

Teddi shrugged. "It's no problem. They're fun kids. Plus I'd be lying if I didn't say that I *really* enjoyed forcing you to watch *Splash*," she laughed. Billy let out a short laugh. "I'll see ya...probably tomorrow." she said, her laugh a bit more awkward this time. Billy nodded and followed her to the front door. He opened it for her and gave an awkward wave.

"Later, Larsson."

"Later, Hargrove." she grinned, turning and making her way to the curb where her van was parked. Billy shut the door after her van disappeared down the street. El and Max were watching him from the hallway.

"Oh, Teddi I love you!" Max said in a deeper voice that Billy assumed was supposed to sound like him. She grabbed El by the shoulders. El laughed and matched Max's movements.

"Kiss me Teddi!" she repeated in the same ridiculous tone before they fell into another fit of giggles.

Billy rolled his eyes and glares at the two girls. "Isn't it time you little assholes go to bed?"

Max raised an eyebrow. "It's ten o'clock, grandpa. Shouldn't *you* be in bed?" She asked, taking El by the hand and pulling her down the hall to her room. He could still hear their laughter and he let out a groan,

falling down onto the couch. He flipped on the TV and mindlessly flipped through the channels. He hated sleepovers.

17. Chapter 17

A/N: Okay, so I'm sorry about this chapter. I told you guys it was gonna suck, but I think you'll be happy with the next one :)

xxx

When Teddi got home from Billy's house her father was waiting for her in the driveway. There was a moment after she saw him that she almost considered just pressing down on the gas, passing her house and never going back. But she knew that that wasn't an option. She couldn't imagine it *ever* being an option. So she pulled into the driveway, took in a deep breath and got out of the car.

Her father had his arms crossed tightly and his jaw was firmly set. It was an expression Teddi was all too familiar with. He didn't move as he watched Teddi make her way up to the house. "Where have you been?" he asked. Teddi didn't answer. She shifted nervously from foot to foot. What kind of a question was that? "And I want you to think very hard about what you're going to say when you answer me."

Teddi swallowed thickly. "...I was at work. At the arcade." she couldn't meet his gaze. Her eyes were focused hard on the garage door behind him.

Her father's expression didn't falter. "I drove past the arcade on the way home for work. Your van wasn't there," he said evenly. Teddi's heart was beating so quickly she almost thought her dad could hear it. "...I've had my suspicions that you've been lying to us. You're not smarter than I am, Theodora. It's not a matter of whether you're going to get caught. It's *when*," his tone hadn't changed. Teddi felt her spine start to tingle as her anxiety grew. "Now, tell me where you really were tonight," Teddi looked down at her feet. "You look at me when I'm speaking to you, Theodora." he spat.

There was the small ray of hope that things wouldn't get too serious as long as they were in the driveway. If there was a chance that someone could see them then her dad wouldn't get out of control. So Teddi stood up a little straighter and looked him in the eyes. "I was babysitting. There's a girl, Max, that's always at the arcade and I was

watching her for a few hours."

He watched her coolly for a few moments. Teddi knew he didn't believe her. He never believed her, whether she was telling the truth or not. "If you were babysitting, then why did you lie to your mother?" Teddi didn't really have an answer for that. It was just sort of a reflex when it came to her parents. If she lied and made them think all she was ever up to was working at the arcade they might not focus so much on whatever it was she was really doing. At least until now anyways. "...What's his name?"

Her father's tone made Teddi's body tense up. Like if she moved or breathed too loudly he'd snap. "...I don't know what you're talking about, daddy. What's *who's* name?" it was taking everything in her not to turn and bolt. Not that that would work either. There would never be even a little chance of her outrunning her father.

"The boy you've been out whoring around with!" Teddi jumped a little. "Do you think I don't know what you've been up to? Do you think I don't know my own daughter?" she almost laughed. He didn't know the first thing about her. "Get in the house," he ordered. Teddi was almost too afraid to move. She hesitated for too long and her father grabbed her arm tightly, leaning in towards her. She could smell that sharp, almost overwhelming smell of alcohol on his breath. "I said *get in the house*, Theodora."

He gave her a hard shove towards the front door. Whenever things got like this with her father Teddi felt something that was worse than anxiety or fear. It was like she couldn't even think straight. Like her body was doing everything it could not to just explode. All she wanted to do was scream at the top of her lungs. Her heart was hammering in her chest and she felt like she couldn't breathe properly. Teddi's fists clenched in an attempt to keep her hands from shaking. That had been a mistake.

Her father's large hand wrapped around her wrist and he pulled her hand up roughly to get a better look at the bruises that were forming on her knuckles. "And what's this? Getting into fights again, are we?" Teddi was sure if he squeeze her wrist just a little harder he could break it. "You've always thought you're so tough, haven't you?" she didn't answer. She bit down on her lip hard, trying to keep herself

from crying. Crying always made it worse.

He hit her. As many times as it had happened over the years, she never saw it coming. Sometimes Teddi wondered if he practiced or something. He had this way of hitting her directly across her cheek that sent this jolt of pain through her cheekbone and made her feel like her eye was going to fall right out of the socket. And she always saw stars after. It was like all Greg Larsson had been built for was to cause pain.

"Answer me when I speak to you!" he spat. He hit her again. It wasn't a slap this time. He'd hit her with a closed fist. Teddi stumbled but didn't let herself fall over. She had planted her feet and gripped onto the back of the couch to keep herself steady. She couldn't let herself fall. No matter how hard he hit her. Teddi briefly wondered if her cheekbone was broken.

"Do you still feel tough?" he asked. Teddi almost hadn't heard him. Everything sounded like it was underwater. And there was a loud, ringing sound in her left ear. "I don't know what I have to do to get you to stop lying to me," it made her feel sick the way he kept his voice so calm. "Do you think I *enjoy* doing this? Do you think I'm doing this for my health?" was Teddi supposed to believe he did any of this because he *loved* her? Because he cared about her? Sometimes she was surprised he could even remember her name. He took her chin in his hand gently. "What do I need to do to keep you from embarrassing this family?"

Teddi shook her head and took in a shaky breath. "You don't have to do anything. I won't. I won't lie again, okay? I'm sorry..." she hated how small her voice was. How scared she sounded. It only gave him more power.

"...Maybe if I take something away from you. Maybe then you'll learn your lesson. You won't be able to see that boy and you'll finally start to act like a lady." Teddi only frowned up at him. What the hell was that supposed to mean? Her father disappeared into the kitchen and returned a few moments later with one of the large steak knives that sat in the wooden block on the counter. Teddi took an instinctive step back, her eyes going wide.

Her father stalked past her, throwing the front door open and heading back outside. Teddi was too afraid to move. Too afraid to see whatever it was that he had planned. He had never done anything like this before. There was a loud pop that was followed by a hiss. Teddi felt her stomach roll. She moved then. Her wobbly legs carried her as fast as they could out to the porch. Her father was bent over, stabbing each of her van's tires.

"No!" she cried. "What are you doing?! I'm not gonna see anyone! I need my van! You can't do this!" she knew that it was stupid to argue with him. It would only make things worse for her if she tried to fight back. But she couldn't help it. Her van was her life. And he was taking that from her over something so completely stupid.

Teddi couldn't fight the tears anymore. They fell freely as she covered her mouth, hoping to quiet herself. Greg made his way back to the porch, pointing the knife at her. His jaw clenched tightly. "If you disobey me *one more time*, Theodora, you're going to be very sorry. This isn't New York. I'm not going to have you behaving that way anymore. You won't embarrass me or your mother anymore, do you understand me?"

Teddi only nodded. "Good. Now get in the house before someone sees you crying and put some ice on your cheek before it bruises." and he marched back inside, leaving his daughter frozen with fear on the porch.

xxx

"*He pointed a fucking knife at you?* What do you mean he pointed a fucking knife at you?" Billy spat. Teddi had called Billy the next morning once her dad had left for work and her mother had gone out with Steve's mom for brunch. Neil and Susan still hadn't come home yet, so it was safe for her to head over to Billy's.

Initially she had wanted to ask if he could help her fix her van. But of course that couldn't happen without confessing to Billy what had happened. The fact that the left side of her face had a nice, large, purple bruise didn't help either. To say he was pissed was putting it lightly. It wasn't often that Teddi saw him like this. He was pacing the room almost like a caged tiger. His hands were set angrily on his

hips and his jaw was clenched so tightly that Teddi was worried he might chip a tooth.

"I mean...I don't think he was *threatening* me with it. We were out on the freakin' porch, you know? Where people could see what he was doing." Teddi hadn't been able to sleep the night before because her mind was trying so hard to convince herself that the knife in her face and the look in her father's eyes hadn't been a threat. It had almost worked until she brought it up to Billy.

"And was anyone around to see you?" he asked. Teddi didn't answer. Billy scoffed loudly and his face screwed up into a snarl. "*Please*. Of course it was a threat," he said it almost more to himself than to Teddi. He stopped pacing for a moment before he looked thoughtfully at her. "...You can't stay there anymore, Teddi." he finally said.

Teddi sighed loudly and fell back onto his bed. "Billy..."

"No. I mean it. It's not like me and Max. You don't have anything forcing you to stay there. You have to get out, Teddi. I don't wanna wake up one morning and see the cops are at your house wheeling you out in a fucking body bag." there had been a part of Teddi that was trying not to think of anything like that ever happening to her. If she could compartmentalize those types of fears it would make living at home easier. But hearing Billy admit to having those kinds of fears for her made her feel sick.

If he was this concerned that meant she wasn't being concerned enough. Teddi stared up at the ceiling and bit her lip. "...I was thinking of moving out," she finally said. "Steve told me about this apartment building that's out by that steel mill we went to on New Year's Eve. I keep talking myself out of going to see it, but maybe now I should just bite the bullet."

"Then I'll take you tomorrow. And you're not fucking arguing with me about it," when Teddi remained silent he made his way over to his bed and pulled her back up to look at him. His hand was gently grabbing her wrist. "*We're going*," he said firmly.

Teddi felt uncomfortable again. Like she had when Hopper had come

into the video store. It made her feel a little pathetic. To be so unused to someone looking out for her that she didn't know how to respond to it like a normal person would. It was taking nearly all of her energy not to brush him off or crack some joke about the situation. Instead she only nodded. "We're going," she agreed.

Billy's tense stance immediately relaxed. The pair looked at each other, unmoving, until there was a knock at the door. Billy turned to see Susan poking her head into his room. "Billy, we're home...oh! Who's your friend?"

Teddi had never met Susan before. All she knew of Billy's step mother was from the occasional story Billy would tell her. She was pretty much what Teddi had imagined. While Susan looked a lot like Max there was something different about her. Softer. She sort of reminded Teddi of Bambi in a way. Quiet and doe eyed. Teddi couldn't imagine what a woman like that would be doing with a guy like Neil.

As if Teddi thinking his name had summoned him, Neil Hargrove appeared behind his wife in Billy's doorway. It was hard for Teddi to keep her expression neutral and not glare up at him. She hated him. And the feeling seemed to be mutual. Neil gave Teddi an unimpressed look as he took her in. Teddi couldn't help but squirm a little in her seat.

Billy's shoulders straightened as he stood a little taller. His eyes focused on the wall next to Susan, like he was too afraid to look at Neil directly. He was trying to play it off and keep his usual casual demeanor, but Teddi saw through it. Teddi hated Neil even more. "This is Teddi. She works at the pool with me," he explained.

Neil's hands rested on his hips. Teddi realized then how much Billy and Neil looked alike. It was amazing to her how two people could be so different but have such similar mannerisms. "And why is she here now?" there was a stern tone to his voice that made Teddi narrow her eyes at him.

"Car's broken," she answered. "I needed a ride to work. I live like a block over." Susan and Billy both shifted uncomfortably. Teddi was sure that there was probably some unspoken rule where you didn't speak to Neil unless spoken too. *Tough shit*, she thought.

"And what happened to your car? Get in an accident? Is that where the bruise came from?" Neil asked.

Teddi made a face and stood up. "What are you, a cop? Look, it was nice meeting you two, but I'm gonna be late to my shift if we don't get going. Ready, Billy?"

Susan's eyes were focused down at the floor. As if she was preparing herself for Neil to explode behind her. Neil's face had turned a lovely shade of red, his jaw clenched tight as he focused a cold look in Teddi's direction. Billy only smirked and grabbed his jacket. "Yeah, we gotta go," Teddi and Billy walked around his parents and down the hall. They didn't say anything until they were safely in Billy's Camaro. "Larsson, I could kiss you right now. He looked like his head was gonna explode." Billy laughed.

Teddi fell into a fit of giggles beside him. "You really weren't kidding about him, huh?" she asked as the car sped off down the street. She let out another laugh. "God our dads suck."

Billy chuckled. "Totally."

Teddi leaned forward and flicked on the Ratt cassette Billy had been listening to before. She looked over at him, watching his fingers tap along to the music against the steering wheel. "So...we told Neil that we're going to work, but we have the day off. What's the plan now?"

"You hungry?" he asked.

Teddi shrugged. "I could eat. Pizza?"

"As long as it's not that pineapple shit again."

Teddi rolled her eyes. "Fine. No pineapple...what if we only get it on half?"

Billy groaned. "Fine, Weird Girl. *Half* pineapple."

18. Chapter 18

A/N: What's this? A surprise, early Arcade Dreams update? I've been dying for y'all to read this chapter. We're gonna move away from show canon a little, this is something I've been planning since I started writing this fic. This chapter has been a looong time coming, and we're gonna get some insight to Teddi's dad's identity. I hope you enjoy!

xxx

Billy and Teddi had gone out for pizza a few hours ago. Afterwards he'd been able to patch up her tires for a temporary fix until he had more time to replace them entirely. They had been on a bit of a time crunch. Neither of Teddi's parents were home, and there was no real way of knowing when her mom (who would *definitely* tell her dad that a boy had been over) would turn up.

Teddi had spent the rest of the night in her room. Her father didn't bother her. Out of sight, out of mind she figured. She was working on some homework when he walked into her room a few hours after he had come home from work. "Your mother and I are going out to dinner. I'm imagining you don't have any plans tonight?" he asked. Teddi thought of her popped tires. *Bastard*, she thought bitterly.

"No, sir. Just finishing up homework." she motioned to her books.

"Good girl. We'll be home in a few hours." and with that he left. Teddi stuck her tongue out at his retreating back. It was like nothing had happened between them. But come tomorrow, he wouldn't be able to boss her around anymore or torment her. She would be out of the house and on her own. She was practically giddy at the idea.

Eventually she gave up on her homework. She just couldn't make herself focus. This had to be how kids felt on Christmas Eve. So excited at the thought of the presents they'd get on Christmas morning that they couldn't sit still. So she plopped down on the couch with some popcorn and settled in for some channel surfing. It wasn't something she got to do very often.

Teddi had settled on the Golden Girls when the phone rang. She nearly let it ring. It wasn't like anyone was calling for her. But then if it was someone from her dad's work and she didn't take a message she knew she wouldn't hear the end of it. So she got up from the couch with a heavy sigh and shuffled over to the kitchen.

"Hello?"

"...Teddi?" it was Max. She was speaking quietly, like she was hiding from someone. It was too late for her to be calling just to chat. Teddi's gut immediately told her something was wrong.

"Max? Is everything okay?" there was a long pause on the other end and Teddi could feel her palms growing clammy.

"We can't find Billy." was all she said.

Teddi's heart was hammering in her chest. Everything had been *fine* earlier. What the hell could have happened between him leaving her to go back home? "Wh-what do you mean you can't *find* him? What happened?"

"He came home a few hours ago and he got in a huge fight with Neil. He stormed off and he hasn't come home or called or anything...it was *bad*, Teddi. Do you have any idea where he might be? I mean, you're his best friend. I'm starting to freak out." Teddi almost couldn't hear Max. All of the images of what Neil might have done to his son were running through her mind at a mile a minute. She almost felt sick.

"Um...I think I might have an idea," she said finally, swallowing thickly. "I'll go find him, okay? Just try and get some sleep. I'll call you tomorrow once everything's calmed down a little." they both hung up and Teddi hurried to her room to grab her boots and puffy jacket. She knew there was a good chance that her tires might pop on her way to Billy, but did she really have any other choice? She definitely couldn't walk out in the snow.

She sped through the streets, praying that her patched tires would survive the drive and that she wouldn't get pulled over by the cops. Everything in town was closed. There was only one place in Teddi's

mind that Billy could be. The Lake. It was their spot. Well, technically not *their* spot. They just coincidentally shared it. Teddi shook her head. That part didn't matter right now.

When she spotted the Camaro parked out at the water's edge she let out a loud sigh of relief. She parked her van and hopped out, hurrying over to Billy's car. She could barely make him out in the dark. The only light coming inside was coming from the end of his lit cigarette. The door was unlocked. She slid in next to him. Neither of them said anything for awhile.

"...Max called me," she finally said. "She's really worried about you."

"I'm fine." Billy spat.

She wasn't going to let him off that easy this time. He wasn't going to scare her away. "What happened, Billy? ...Did he hurt you?" he didn't say anything. He simply blew out a cloud of smoke. "...Can I see?"

There was another long pause. Billy sniffed and angrily pushed on the light above them. Teddi's hand slowly covered her mouth in an attempt to stifle the gasp she wanted to let out. Billy's left eye was swollen shut. His eyebrow had a cut in it that was deep enough for Teddi to know it would scar. It had stopped bleeding at least, but the blood had run down over his eye and down the left side of his face. There was also a nasty split in the center of his lip. Teddi was surprised he was smoking at all. The boy in front of her was almost unrecognizable. "Billy..." she said softly.

"I was in my room," he said finally. "It was after I came back from your place. Everything was fine, you know? Susan was making dinner and Max and Neil were watching tv," he swallowed loudly, flicking his cigarette out the window. His fingers gripped tightly at the steering wheel. "All of the sudden he starts getting on Max's case about something. I don't know what. But he wouldn't stop. And she was arguing back. Sometimes she doesn't know when to quit with him. But they just kept getting louder, so I stood out in the hall just in case...he just started *screaming* at her. And I've never seen her scared like that. Max isn't scared of shit, y'know? But he just kept yelling and I could just *feel* that he was gonna hurt her if I didn't stop him," he trailed off, but Teddi didn't need for him to finish. The shape

he was in told her everything she needed to know.

"I'm not fucking doing this anymore, Teddi. I *can't*. Sometimes I catch myself imagining something horrible happening to him. *Doing* something horrible. And I never feel bad, you know? He *deserves* it. He's the reason my mom left. He's the reason she didn't take me with her. He's *not* my fucking father. Sometimes I think he's barely even human."

Teddi's heart ached when she saw his eyes welling up with tears. She took one of his hands in her own, her thumb running gently over his bruising knuckles. "I think...I think you should come with me. To the apartment." she said.

Billy let out a loud sigh. "I can't. Max-"

Teddi shook her head. "Billy, we need to get out. I know that you're worried about Max. I'm worried about her too. But if we leave, if we get that apartment...it can be like a safe place for her to go. Whenever she needs it, you know? Until we can figure out how to get her out of that house," she reached up and touched his face, her fingers ghosting gently over his bruised cheek. Her heart ached again when he leaned into her touch. "You can't go back there," after what felt like forever Billy finally nodded. "Come on. I have a first aid kit in my van. We can spend the night here, I'll call Max in the morning and we'll go see about the apartment, okay?"

Billy followed her silently to her van. They climbed into the back, and Teddi pulled out the first aid kit that she kept under the driver's seat. "Sorry, usually it's just me using this so I kinda only have girly band-aids..." she mumbled, wincing and apologizing as Billy hissed at the feeling of the alcohol being dabbed at his cuts.

"A pink band-aid's the least of my worries right now, Larsson." he was trying to smile, trying to crack a joke with her. Teddi let out a soft laugh.

"You know..." she said, gently blowing on the cut on his eyebrow before applying the band-aid. "Max said that I was your best friend..." she said with a smile.

Billy shifted uncomfortably. "What am I? A twelve year old girl?" he asked.

Teddi only shrugged. "...You're my best friend." she confessed.

Billy scoffed. "Right."

"I'm serious. I mean...me and Steve are pretty good friends, but you know way more about me than he does. You know stuff about me that he probably won't ever know, you know? And like...you're the first person I want to talk to when something happens. Good or bad. I don't know...you just are." she awkwardly shrugged again.

There was another long pause as Teddi finished cleaning Billy's face. "...Are we gonna make matching bracelets?" he asked.

"I know you're being sarcastic, but don't think for a second that I wouldn't do that."

Billy let out a short laugh. "...Thanks for this, Teddi."

"Don't mention it. You'd do the same thing for me." he would. Of course he would.

Teddi pulled out her sleeping bag and unzipped it completely before kicking off her boots. "I think we both definitely need some sleep."

Billy kicked off his boots as well and slid under the sleeping bag with her. They laid next to each other, both staring up at the disco ball hanging above them. Teddi tentatively reached out, her hand finding Billy's. He linked his fingers with hers. "...You sleep in here a lot?" he asked finally.

"I have a few times," Teddi confessed. "Back in New York."

"...What about your parents? Aren't they gonna be pissed when you don't come home?"

"Who cares? We don't have to worry about that sort of stuff anymore, right?"

It was a hard thought to wrap their minds around. This was it. No

more answering to Greg or Neil. No more unfair rules or punishments. They would be out on their own. Together.

xxx

The next morning the pair drove to the apartment building in the Camaro. It was obvious that the building used to be a motel. There was a gated pool out in front, with two vending machines nearby. There was what looked to be a working ice machine that sat just outside of the front office. If the old man running the place could tell that Billy and Teddi were obviously teenagers, he didn't show it. Billy flashed a fake ID that said he was 23 and that had been enough for him.

He showed them an apartment on the second floor. There wasn't an elevator. Teddi was pretty sure it had been two adjoining rooms that they had turned into one larger apartment. There was a tiny living room with a counter that would be their kitchen. Two bedrooms sandwiched a very tiny bathroom between them. It wasn't the worst thing. The apartment had gotten a fresh coat of paint and some tacky, flowery wallpaper. And it wasn't like they were used to anything fancy.

Between their three jobs they would definitely be able to handle the rent. It was close enough to Hawkins that they'd be able to make it to school and work without a problem. And what was most important; it was *theirs*.

Teddi couldn't control her smile as they drove back into town. Her cheeks were starting to hurt. Her eyes were stinging from the threat of tears. "...Is this really happening?" she asked.

Billy nodded, a smile of his own spreading across his lips. "It's really happening."

They both went quiet as Billy turned onto Cherry road. The Camaro came to a stop outside of the Hargrove's house, the two of them looking up at the tiny house while holding their breaths. This was really it.

The most important thing would be getting Billy's things before Neil

came home. Or at least as much as they could. Max was outside skateboarding in the street. She hugged Billy tightly when she saw him. He awkwardly patted his step sister on the back. He'd never show it or admit it, but Teddi knew he appreciated the fact that Max cared about him.

Susan was hovering awkwardly in the living room. She was asking Billy if he was alright and telling him that she had been worried about him when he never came home. Teddi believed her. Teddi believed that Susan loved Max and cared about Billy. She knew that Susan wasn't the same as her own mother. But it didn't make her like Susan any. She still sat back and let Neil rule his household with an iron fist.

Teddi and Billy went to his room, Max and Susan following close behind them. Susan was asking a million questions and Billy ignored each of them. He went for his stereo first. He yanked the power cord free from the wall, turning and handing it over to Teddi. "Billy, please. Don't you think this is an overreaction? I'm sure you and your father can work things out-" Susan pleaded.

"An overreaction?" Billy let out a dry laugh. "He's your problem now, Susan. You don't have to pretend to feel sorry for me and look the other way anymore," he picked up a milk crate full of his records. "Maybe this is best for both of us, huh? You'll finally see what a goddamn monster he is when it's pointed in your direction."

That was enough to keep Susan out of their way. She sat on the couch, fidgeting anxiously as she watched Billy, Teddi and Max march back and forth between the Camaro and Billy's room. His music had been the most important thing. Once his stereo, record player, cassettes and records were all safely in the back seat Billy grabbed a few trash bags and started filling it with his clothes.

"...Where are you going?" Max finally asked. She and Teddi were both carefully taking Billy's things from his closet, folding them before putting them in the large black bags. Billy was grabbing fists full of his clothes out of his drawers, angrily shoving them in the trash bags.

"We got an apartment outside of town." he muttered.

Max looked between the both of them. "Together?" she asked. Max had never really understood why Teddi and Billy liked each other so much. She knew that they didn't really have much in common aside from her and working at the pool. Max knew that Billy liked Teddi, and she knew that Teddi liked Billy. She and El had always thought it was obvious, even if they argued all of the time. But they assumed it was just because they were dumb teenagers that found each other attractive. Now suddenly, seeing Billy finally at his breaking point, and Teddi with a bruise that covered her left eye and cheek, she realized that they had more in common than she had ever imagined.

Beneath the surface Billy and Teddi were two very lonely people. And now they had finally found someone to pull each other out of that loneliness.

Teddi nodded, smiling a little. "Together. And Max, you're allowed to come over whenever you want, okay? It's small, but there's a pullout couch with your name on it. You can even have sleepovers with El. Whatever you want. Just promise me that he ever makes you feel unsafe again you call me and I'll come and get you, alright?"

Max looked over at Billy. He nodded, so slightly that Max almost wasn't sure she'd seen it. "...I promise."

"I'll pick you up from school tomorrow and show you the place, alright? C'mon, Ted. We gotta go. I'll come back for the rest," Teddi noticed Billy pulling a small wooden box out of his top drawer. It was about the size of his hand. It was a sandy color with something etched into the lid. He quickly shoved it into the pocket inside his jacket, like Teddi and Max weren't supposed to see it. "...You gonna be okay, Max?" he asked.

"I'm fine. Mom says I'm allowed to sleep over at El's since Neil's being an asshole....I'm sorry, Billy. That he went off on you like that. It was my fault. He wanted me to change the channel and I kept arguing with him..."

Billy placed a hand on his step sister's shoulder, leaning down to meet her eyes. "Don't ever apologize for him, got it? If it wasn't that it would've been something else. You remember what I told you back home? At Captain Spauldings?" Max's shoulders straightened a little

as she nodded. Teddi couldn't help but wonder what their secret was. "You call us if you need us, okay? We'll be there." Billy awkwardly ruffled the top of Max's head before heading back to the Camaro. He didn't bother to look in Susan's direction as he passed.

He and Teddi finished loading his things into the trunk and got in. Max was on the porch, waving as they drove off. Teddi let out a shaky breath. She looked over at Billy, who was drumming his fingers against the steering wheel even though the radio was off. He looked...calm. This wasn't a Billy she saw very often. There was a hint of a smile on his lips. He looked like a weight had been lifted off of his shoulders.

This all felt like a dream. To be in Billy's Camaro, the two of them finally about to escape the nightmare that was their home lives. It all felt almost too good to be true. Like at any second something horrible would happen, or she would wake up and realize that none of this was even real. Billy bumped his elbow against Teddi's, bringing her back to the real world. "Hey," he said lowly. "You okay?"

He fished his pack of cigarettes out of his jacket and held it out to Teddi. She eyed them for a moment before taking a smoke, clamping it between her lips. "I'm just nervous," she muttered as Billy lit the cigarette for her. Teddi took a long drag, her eyes falling shut and her head falling back against her seat. "My dad'll be home soon..."

"Don't worry about him. You just worry about getting your stuff." they both knew that that would be easier said than done. Billy would be somewhat of a safety net for her. Her dad probably wouldn't do or say much of anything if there was someone around to see him in action. He had too much to lose. But he had been a little unpredictable lately, and Teddi was worried that Billy might have to take the brunt of what was about to come.

While Billy had been to Teddi's once before, this was the first time he had ever seen Teddi's mother. Teddi looked a lot like her. He didn't understand how Bonnie could look at her daughter, who was the spitting image of her, and feel absolutely nothing for her. Billy hated her. She was sitting on the couch, flipping through the channels on TV when they walked in. When Teddi and Billy walked into her field of vision, she finally looked over at them with a bored expression.

"And who's this?" Bonnie asked, looking Billy up and down. If she felt any sort of way about him, she didn't show it. It was like she wasn't a real person. Like she was one of those mind control victims in those sci fi movies Max liked to watch. Billy briefly wondered if at one point Bonnie had been more like Teddi. Energetic and friendly. Maybe Greg had succeeded in beating her into submission, like Neil had tried with Billy's mom. Now he had the perfect stepford wife that was loyal only to him. Even at the expense of his own daughter.

"None of your business," there was a confidence behind Teddi's voice that Billy was a little surprised to hear. This wasn't the same Teddi that had been fidgeting nervously in the Camaro just minutes before. "I'm leaving." she announced before heading down the hall. He wasn't surprised that Bonnie didn't follow after them like Susan had.

Billy followed Teddi to her room. He'd never seen it before. It was smaller than his room. There was only a tiny desk, a nightstand and Teddi's bed packed tightly inside. Teddi opened her closet door, reaching in and pulling out a stack of flattened cardboard boxes. He wondered how many times she had pulled them out before, trying to work up the courage to pack before changing her mind.

They were silent as they started to pack up her things. Teddi made quick work of emptying out her closet before standing up on her bed to peel the little glow in the dark stars off of her ceiling. Billy went over to her desk. There was a Carrie poster taped to the wall next to a tiny bulletin board. There were about a dozen different movie ticket stubs tacked to it. A grainy polaroid of the statue of liberty next to a photo of Teddi standing on a lake dock. She was in a bright blue bikini with white, star shaped sunglasses and she had her arm around a girl with a head of pink, unruly curls. Teddi looked happy. Genuinely happy. It was a gross contrast from the Teddi that was in front of him now. He carefully picked each of the things she had tacked up to the board and tucked them into a box along with the other things on her desk.

"Your mother tells me you're leaving." Billy jumped a little at the sound of Greg Larsson's voice. Teddi's dad was a big guy. Easily about 6'4. He took up the entire doorway. His hair was shaved close on the sides and longer on top. Like at one point he'd been a jarhead and hadn't been able to let it go. He looked like the poster boy for some

sort of weird super soldier experiment gone wrong. Billy's hands clenched into fists. It wasn't like him and Neil. Neil was the same size as Billy. If Billy wanted to fight back he could. Greg was almost three times Teddi's size. What kind of pathetic asshole picked on someone that was so helpless to defend themselves? *You about two months ago?* He reminded himself. His fists clenched tighter.

Teddi turned to look at her father with a look of disgust before returning to her packing. "What do you care?"

"Theodora...is this about the disagreement we had the other day?" he asked, crossing his arms tightly across his chest.

Teddi laughed. "*Disagreement?* You mean when you called me a whore and almost fractured my skull?" she asked, pointing to the large bruise on her cheek. Billy knew that if he hadn't been there she probably wouldn't have said that to her father. He didn't mind that him being there was an extra boost of courage. He was proud of her. "What do you even care if I leave? You don't care about me. You and mom have never cared about me. So let me go and you can just pretend that I never existed like you've always wanted." her voice cracked a little as she spoke, but she didn't cry.

Billy wondered what might have happened if he hadn't been there. If he hadn't inched his way over between Teddi and Greg in case he decided to do something bold. He was thinking about it. Billy knew that he was. His sharp jaw clenched and unclenched. His hand was twitching as if he was trying to keep himself for lashing out at her. Greg watched his daughter with a cold expression. Like if he could kill her right then and there with a look, he would.

"...If you leave, you are no longer welcome in this home. You're not going to come crying to me when *he* gets tired of you and moves on to the next girl. You're no longer my daughter."

Billy didn't see that as much of a threat. Greg wasn't Teddi's father. He'd explained it to Max back in California when she had finally seen Neil for what he really was. Billy and Teddi could call Neil and Greg their fathers all they wanted. But men, and Billy used that term lightly, like Neil and Greg couldn't be fathers to anyone. They were monsters. Monsters that were keeping Billy and Teddi hostage for

their own sick enjoyment.

Teddi laughed again. Her eyes were shiny with the threat of tears. She picked up the box that sat at her feet, walking up to Greg with her head held high. "*Good.*"

xxx

Billy and Teddi were both sitting on their new couch in their new apartment. They were both silent, staring at their reflection in the blank TV screen in front of them. Teddi had cried in the car after they left her parents' house. She cried the entire drive to the apartment. Billy had reached over, putting his arm around her and pulling her towards him. Teddi cried into his shoulder, her tears soaking into his denim jacket. Neither of them said anything until Billy pulled into the parking lot of their apartment building.

Teddi pulled away from him, wiping her eyes roughly. Her bottom lip trembled, like she could start crying at any given second. She looked over at him, her cheeks still slick with tears. "...Thank you." she finally said.

He didn't really know what she was thanking him for. Leaving with her. Helping her get her things. Letting her cry on his shoulder. It didn't really matter to him. The corner of his mouth twitched up into a grin. "What are friends for, right?"

Teddi let out a soft laugh. She bit down on her bottom lip as the two looked at each other. Billy could feel his heart beating harshly in his chest. Teddi looked beautiful. Otherworldly in the red light that was shining down onto the Camaro from the building's neon sign. She sniffed softly, shifting nervously in her seat before her hand gently ghosted his bruised cheek, just like she had the night before. Billy didn't move as she bit her lip again, leaning forward and kissing him so softly he was almost scared he had imagined it. She pulled away from him, watching him and waiting to see if what she had done was okay.

Billy wrapped his arms around Teddi's waist, pulling her back to him. He kissed her. Teddi let out a surprised sound, her hands gripping onto his shoulders. Teddi had wondered what this moment would be

like. What it might be like to kiss Billy. None of it really matched up to the actual thing. Everything about him was...strong. His arms wrapped around her, the feel of his chest as her hands slid under his jacket. His lips. Everything about Billy Hargrove made Teddi feel safe. She never wanted this to end. She would be content staying there in Billy's Camaro, kissing him and letting him hold her until the world ended.

"If that's how you say thank you I should've started being nicer a long time ago." Billy smirked. His arms were still wrapped around her middle, and Teddi was gripping onto his shirt beneath his jacket.

Teddi laughed a little and rolled her eyes. "*Funny*," her hand reached up, her thumb stroking his jaw gently. "...We should probably get inside." she sighed.

They brought the things they'd packed up the stairs and inside their new home. Now they were on the couch, their hands just barely touching. "...We should skip school tomorrow. Celebrate our new freedom." he finally said.

"Celebrate our new freedom by being irresponsible?" she asked with a smile.

"It's one day, Larsson. Come on. Let's do something fun."

Teddi eyed him carefully, trying to hide a smile as her cheeks blushed. "...You better be real careful with whatever you're about to suggest, Hargrove." she warned.

Billy smirked. "Relax. I meant like going to the movies or something. What about that Terminator movie? Freddy said it was pretty badass."

Teddi made a face. "I don't know...I'm not super crazy about that Schwarzenegger guy. He's always reminded me too much of my dad. What about Starman?"

Billy blinked. "...What's that?"

"It's the one with Jeff Bridges who's an alien pretending to be a human and he and he takes Marion from Indiana Jones with him to

try and get back to space?" she explained, as if he were crazy for not knowing. Billy only stared at her. "It's John Carpenter!"

"Is that supposed to mean something to me?"

"Halloween? The Thing? Escape From New York? He's like the best director ever."

Billy rolled his eyes and held his hands up. "...Whatever, Larsson. We'll go see Spaceman."

"Starman."

"*Whatever.*" there was a different energy as they got back in the Camaro. They were both smiling, almost giddy. Teddi flipped through the collection of tapes Billy kept in the glove compartment. She settled on Journey, popping the tape into the deck. Billy's fingers drummed against the steering wheel along to the beat.

Their eyes met, the two of them sharing a smile. Billy propped his elbow up on the center console, holding out his middle finger to her. Teddi laughed, raising an eyebrow. "What is this, a Billy Hargrove pinky promise? What are we, five?"

Billy smirked over at her. "Says the girl that wanted to make friendship bracelets," he joked. Teddi let out a chuckle and linked her finger with his. His ring was cold against her skin. "It's you and me now, Larsson. We're in this together. You ready?"

She was. Of course she was. They were quite the pair. Two misfits that felt like they didn't belong anywhere. Battered and bruised. But they had finally found a home. With each other. Teddi smiled as Billy brought her hand to his lips, pressing a kiss to her bruised knuckles. "As ready as I'll ever be."

19. Chapter 19

A/N: Who's ready to see more Hopper? I know I sure am.

xxx

It took everyone a week to find out that Billy and Teddi had moved in together. Neither of them were entirely sure how it started. Billy was pretty sure someone at the pool had overheard them talking at work and started the gossip train. At first it was easy for them to ignore. They *were* living together and they *were* together...technically. Things in the romance department were complicated. Mostly because they were making them complicated. Teddi didn't want people knowing they were together. Billy hadn't understood, but he agreed to keep his hands to himself when they were in public.

That didn't stop the gossip. Teddi was sure that there couldn't be anything going around that was worse than her and Billy running off to get married, or that she was ever in a relationship with Tommy H. She was wrong.

"Teddi!" someone called her in the hall as Teddi walked out of her American history class. It was Heather. Teddi waited for her friend to catch up, smiling sweetly at her. Heather looked like she had seen a ghost. "Are you pregnant?" she asked quietly, looking over her shoulders to make sure no one passing by was listening in.

"*What?*" Teddi asked incredulously. "Pregnant? No! Where the hell did you hear that?"

Heather took Teddi by the arm, pulling her over towards the lockers. The two girls huddled together. "*Everyone* is saying it. I heard Carol talking about it with Cheryl Burns in math this morning. Carol said that's why you and Billy moved in together. You got knocked up and his dad was gonna disown him-"

Teddi held up her hands. "Okay, that is so totally not true. I'm not even with Billy-"

"But you really are living together?" Heather asked.

"I mean..." Teddi sighed. "Heather, it's super complicated, okay? I can explain...*eventually*, but I'm not dating Billy, and I'm *definitely* not pregnant." she assured her.

Heather let out a loud sigh, like she was relieved by the news. "Good. I mean, no offense but it would totally ruin your life," Teddi could definitely agree there. "I'll try and do some damage control. But Tommy H is totally running his mouth about you guys."

Teddi rolled her eyes. "I don't doubt that. *Thanks*, Heather. Seriously."

Heather only shrugged, tossing her hair over her shoulder. "It's what friends are for. But I wanna know *all* of the details later." the look on Heather's face told Teddi that she wasn't completely buying all of Teddi's lies.

Teddi smiled thinly, nodding. "Deal. I gotta go though. I'll see you later?"

"Totally. See ya!" Heather threw a wave over her shoulder as the two parted ways. It was almost lunchtime, which meant Billy would be out in the parking lot. Teddi weaved her way through the halls, avoiding the mix of looks the other students were shooting her way and headed out to where the Camaro was parked. Billy drove them to school every morning. They would wake up a little earlier, head to the Hargrove's to pick up Max and at the end of the day Billy would drop Teddi off at the arcade for her shift. She supposed she could maybe see where some of the rumors were coming from.

Billy was leaning against the hood of the Camaro, looking off towards the basketball courts and smoking a cigarette. He heard Teddi walking up to him, looking back at her over his shoulder and flashing a grin her way. He took a drag of his cigarette, blowing the smoke out of the corner of his mouth as he looked back at the parking lot behind Teddi. When he was satisfied that the coast was clear, he kissed her.

Teddi felt her cheeks grow hot, looking over her shoulder shyly to make sure no one had seen. "Billy..."

"Yeah, yeah. *Low key*," he placed the cigarette between his lips again,

watching as Teddi shifted nervously beside him. "...You okay?"

Teddi chewed on her bottom lip, shaking her head. "Have you heard anything people are saying about us?"

"That you're knocked up?" he said it so casually. Teddi scoffed. "There something you wanna tell me, Larsson?" he was *teasing* her. She couldn't believe he could tease her over something like this.

Teddi crossed her arms, moving to stand in front of him. She narrowed her eyes as she looked up at him. "You have to have sex for that to happen, genius."

Billy smirked, leaning down at a little. "I'm aware of how it works, Ted," she let out an annoyed huff. Billy flicked the butt of his cigarette away, his hand resting on her waist. "What's the big deal? Everyone'll know it's not true when you don't...*blow up* in a few months."

"Nice."

Billy let out a soft laugh. "I'm just saying. Teddi, who gives a shit what anyone in this shitty town thinks of us? Who cares if they know that we're together? Of if we got our own place? It's none of their fucking business." he was right. Teddi knew that he was. Maybe it was because she didn't like drawing too much attention to herself. Or maybe...

"It's not *that*..." Teddi sighed. She could make herself say it. She looked down, focusing on her boots. They were slick from the snowy slush that covered the parking lot.

Billy placed two fingers under Teddi's chin, gently lifting her head to look into her eyes. "Then what is it? You're freaking me out here, Weird Girl. You're not really one to keep your opinions to yourself."

Teddi was chewing on her lip again. "I guess...I guess I don't want people to know about *this* because I'm not really sure what *this* is," Billy pulled his hand away from her. His jaw had set firmly. Teddi sighed. "Billy, it's just that it's *you*...it's *us*." Nice, Teddi thought, *try harder Teddi, maybe you can make this come out even worse.*

Billy pulled away from her. Teddi reached out for him, but he took a step back. Teddi opened her mouth to say something, *anything* that could fix what she had done.

"Ooo, are we interrupting a lovers quarrel?" Teddi sighed at the sound of Tommy's voice. She and Billy both turned to face Tommy and Carol. There was a small group with them. Apparently Tommy was the new king of the hill at Hawkins' high. Teddi could only roll her eyes. "You know, Teddi, all this stress can't be good for your little bun in the oven." he teased with a snarl like grin.

"*Fuck off*, Tommy." Teddi spat. She took a step forward, but Billy grabbed her arm, stepping out in front of her.

Carol looked a little surprised for a moment. She grabbed at the arm of Tommy's coat, ready to pull him away. When Tommy let out a cackle, Carol's nervous expression faded and she laughed along with her boyfriend. "Would you look at that, Car," Tommy snickered. "Looks like Billy Boy's rubbed off on her in more ways than one, huh? What are you gonna do, Teddi? Hit me? Rearrange my face like your psychopath of a boyfriend did to Steve?" he taunted. "Did Billy do that to your face? Looks *nasty*."

Billy's hand clenched into a fist, but he didn't move towards Tommy. "Sure says a lot about you that you think a girl could kick your ass, Tom."

Tommy's smile faded, and he took a step closer to Billy. Billy took a step to meet him, just like he had at the New Year's party. "You and your little bitch think you're so funny, don't you, Hargrove? You think you're so *cool*. That you two can just swoop on in and run the place? You two are just pieces of trash whose parents don't even *want* them."

Billy hit him. There was a collectively gasp behind them. Carol had taken an instinctive step backwards. Teddi stayed behind Billy, reaching out to grab the back of his denim jacket in a pathetic attempt to pull him away. Tommy stood upright, letting out a laugh as he wiped the blood from his nose. The two boys stared at each other for a few long moments before Tommy lunged for Billy.

He hit him like a brick wall. Billy had his feet planted firmly, shoving Tommy hard. Tommy let out another laugh as he stumbled. He threw a punch at Billy, throwing his entire weight behind it. That had really done it. Carol was yelling at Tommy to stop. The crowd behind them were cheering as the two boys fought.

It all happened too fast for Teddi to really take in. Tommy had gotten a few good hits in. He had opened the cut on Billy's eyebrow, and his nose and lip were bleeding. That had really set Billy off. He'd gotten this look in his eyes, one that Teddi hadn't seen before. It scared her. Billy had overpowered Tommy with three hard knocks to the head. Tommy's head had bounced off the pavement with each hit. He had started moving a little slower. That was enough for Billy. Billy brought his knee down onto Tommy's chest, anchoring him to the ground. One hand wrapped around Tommy's neck, the other hitting him hard across the face. He didn't stop.

Carol was screaming now. Tommy had gone almost completely still. "Billy! Stop it! You're gonna kill him!" Teddi gasped out. She lurched forward, grabbing Billy by the arm. He shoved her hard, sending her to the ground. Pain shot up through her wrist and up her arm. Teddi watched on with wide eyes.

"Hey! That's enough!" it was the boy's basketball coach. He was running over towards them, one of the kids that had been watching the fight close behind. Eventually they managed to pull Billy off of Tommy. Carol fell to her knees next to him, pulling her boyfriend up into her lap.

Teddi's heart was beating hard in her chest as she looked up at Billy. His face was all screwed up in a snarl, his breathing coming out in ragged gasps. His eyes met with Teddi's, and his expression immediately softened. Billy moved towards her, but the coach held him back. "Jesus, Hargrove. The hell has gotten into you? Someone go to the front office and get the nurse. You two," he pointed at Billy and Teddi. "You're going to the principal's office. *Now.*"

xxx

A fight like this was going to be more than a slap on the wrist from the principal. He had spoken to Billy, Teddi and Carol individually.

Tommy was still with the school nurse. Apparently he was barely conscious. Which meant the principle was going to call the police. Which meant Jim Hopper.

Teddi was sitting outside of the principal's office when he showed up. The nurse had given her an ice pack for her wrist after she'd landed on it in the parking lot. Hopper stopped in front of her, the two of them looking at each other but not saying anything. She hadn't seen the chief since he'd come into the video store to ask about how things were at home.

Hopper let out a sigh. "He in there?" he asked, nodding to the office. Teddi nodded. "Come with me," she didn't need to be told twice. She shuffled in after the chief, shutting the door behind her. Billy sunk in his seat when he saw Hopper walk in. His face had stopped bleeding, but he hadn't been able to clean himself up. It almost looked like there was a bruise forming on top of the bruise that was already there. Hopper took a seat at the principal's desk, Teddi sitting next to Billy. More silence. "...Alright. Which one of you wants to tell me what happened?"

"Tommy H is a prick," Billy spat. It was clear that answer wasn't going to cut it with Hopper. Billy let out a loud sigh. His hands clenched and unclenched in his lap. "He came up to us in the parking lot and started talking shit. He got in my face...and I snapped." Teddi could tell he was ashamed. Embarrassed even.

"And did you do that to her?" Hopper asked, motioning to the bruise on Teddi's face, now healing and turning a yellow color, and the ice pack pressed to Teddi's wrist.

Teddi jumped to his defence. "It was an accident. I was trying to pull him off of Tommy...the bruise is...different."

"Have you two seen the kid? What the hell could he have said to deserve a beating like that?" the two teens remained silent. There was no way Billy could come out of this clean. Hopper sighed. "Look...the nurse is cleaning Tommy up. If he doesn't need to go to the hospital then I'm not gonna have to get involved," Teddi let out a sigh of relief. Hopper held up his hand. "*But*, Billy's gonna be suspended. For at least a week. And I'm gonna have to call your parents."

Billy let out a dry laugh. "Good luck with that."

"The hell is that supposed to mean?" Hopper asked.

Teddi bit down on her lip. She looked over at Billy. He wouldn't look at her. "He doesn't...*we* don't live at home anymore," Hopper looked between the two, his eyebrows raised and looking truly speechless. This hadn't been a can of worms that Teddi wanted to open. "We have an apartment. Out by the Brimborn steel mill. That's why Tommy was harassing us. Someone started a rumor that I'm pregnant-"

"Are you?" Hopper asked.

Teddi rolled her eyes. "No. We're not- I mean we *are*- we *were*," she shook her head. "No." she repeated firmly.

Hopper sat up, eyeing the two of them. "And you two moved out because things are so great at home, huh?" they didn't say anything. He ran a tired hand over his face. "Look...if you two want me to look the other way, you're gonna have to keep yourselves out of trouble. I can't keep any of your little secrets if they keep calling me down here." Billy shot an unsure look in Teddi's direction. Hopper looked between the two teens again. "I'm gonna send you two home, and I'm gonna have a talk with Tommy. But before I let you go, is there anything else you wanna tell me?"

He was giving them an out. He might as well have just said "I know all about your asshole parents. Just say the word and I'll throw them in jail." Teddi wished it was that simple. She wished that there wasn't the threat of Max being put into foster care god only knows where. She wished that there could be actual consequences for her father instead of any accusations being swept under the rug thanks to his job with the mayor. Teddi wished that she could take Hopper up on his offer. And she knew that Billy wished he could too. But that was impossible.

When neither of them said anything, Hopper nodded. "Alright. Get outta here. I better not see you two in a mess like this again."

"You won't...thanks, Hopper." Teddi smiled a little, tugging on the

sleeve of Billy's jacket. The ride home was silent. Billy wouldn't even look in Teddi's direction. When they pulled up to the apartment building, he cut the engine and headed inside as if she wasn't even there. Billy plopped down on the couch with a loud groan, turning the TV on and mindlessly flipping through the channels.

Teddi went to their tiny bathroom, wetting a washcloth and sitting next to Billy. "If you won't talk to me, can you at least let me clean all the blood off of you?" Billy let out an irritated sigh, tossing the remote aside and turning towards her. His jaw was set tightly as she started to dab at his cuts. "...Can you at least tell me if you're mad at me?" she asked quietly.

"...I would've killed him if coach hadn't stopped me," he said. Teddi didn't argue. She couldn't. "I did the same thing to Harrington. Max had to jam a tranquilizer in my neck to stop me," he let out a dry laugh. "She snuck out with Lucas to go to the Byers'. I was supposed to be watching her. My dad...I guess you can imagine how that went over. I still don't know what the hell went on that night. She won't tell me. I just remember her almost smashing my dick with a baseball bat, and the next thing I knew I woke up in my bed," he laughed again, more genuinely this time.

"I feel like I'm never gonna shake this off, Ted. I'll always be this guy that let's his anger get away with him and I'll end up like Neil."

Teddi tucked a piece of his hair behind his ear, letting out a soft sigh. "This is just a set back. I mean, don't get me wrong it was *bad*...but you're not that guy anymore. You're not Neil. I think it means a lot that you feel bad about hurting Tommy...even though he sorta maybe deserved it." they both laughed softly.

Billy placed a hand over Teddi's. "I'm sorry I hurt you." he said lowly.

Teddi shook her head. "It's fine."

"It's *not* fine...you know that I'd never hurt you, right?" his voice sounded so small. Teddi knew that he didn't want her to think he was like her dad. She didn't.

"I know that," she said with a thin smile. Teddi bit her lip, her fingers

picking at the bloody washcloth in her hands. "...I'm sorry about what I said earlier."

Billy let out an irritated breath out through his nose, his head fell back against the couch. He *definitely* hadn't wanted to pick this conversation up again. "So...what, you think I'm gonna fuck around or something? You're gonna walk in on me and Cheryl again?" Teddi was quiet. Billy sat up and looked at her. "You *can't* be serious, Larsson."

"Do you have any idea how many times you've told me that you don't date? You sleep with girls and then move on to the next one when you get bored of her?" Billy wouldn't look her in the eyes. He crossed his arms firmly across his chest and focused on the TV. Teddi groaned. "Billy...I just wanna take things slow. It's gotten insanely, super complicated now that we live together. I just want to make sure things actually work, and that we don't let hormones get in the way."

Billy was still quiet. He let out a grumble, finally looking over at her. "You just don't want me knocking you up."

Teddi let out another groan, letting of a soft laugh and resting her forehead against his shoulder. "God, don't even joke about that," Billy lifted her into his lap, Teddi straddling him. Her fingers played with the collar of his shirt as they looked at each other. There was a Talking Heads video playing on the TV. "You promise you're not mad at me then?"

Billy was quiet for a moment, pretending to think it over. "Depends..." his hands were on Teddi's waist, his thumbs rubbing gently at her sides. "You say no sex, but what about like dry fuc-"

"Billy."

"I'm just *asking*," he laughed. Billy's hands slid under Teddi's thighs, he tossed her easily onto her back. Teddi's stomach flipped as he crawled over her with that wolf like grin of his, nestling himself between her legs. Her hands immediately weaved into his hair when he kissed her. One of Billy's hands travelled down her side, his fingers dipping under her shirt. Her skin felt hot as his fingers ghosted across

the skin of her stomach, leaving little butterflies and goosebumps in their wake. Teddi let out a sigh.

Billy pulled away, his lips slick with her lip gloss. Teddi blinked up at him. "...I'm hungry. You want pizza?"

Teddi's mouth opened and closed a few times as Billy looked down at her with an amused smile. "...Sure."

"Pineapple?" she only nodded. Billy got up from the couch and headed over to the dull, navy colored phone hanging on the wall to order the pizza. Teddi groaned, her head falling back against the couch. *Bastard*, she thought, hiding her face in her hands.

20. Chapter 20

A/N: Twenty chapters I can't believe it. I'm nervous about this chapter guys, not gonna lie. I've had a few comments wondering about Teddi's past relationships, so here it is! We're unlocking a piece of Teddi's backstory that's sure to have an affect on things in the future. Enjoy!

xxx

If it was one thing that Teddi had learned while living with Billy, it was that he went stir crazy *very* quickly. She knew that it was something that had developed from living with Neil. The longer Billy stayed home, the bigger the chance that Neil would find something to get mad at him over. Teddi noticed that when she was at work Billy would often bring Max to the arcade to hang out. If they were home on weekends he would suggest going out to the movies or really *anything* to get out of the apartment. She couldn't blame him, she was the same way. It was going to be a tough habit for him to break, But Teddi wanted him to know that they were in a space now that he didn't have to avoid. It was safe.

While he was suspended for the week he didn't really have much to do or anywhere to go. The pool was only open on weekends during the winter, so mostly he sat around on the couch and waited for Teddi to come home. And being stuck indoors made him easily irritated.

It had never really been pointed in her direction until now. Teddi had come home from school to see that Billy had moved their coffee table out of the way and was lifting weights while MTV played in the background. He had a cigarette clamped hard between his lips, puffs of smoke escaping each time he grunted. Teddi dropped her books onto the kitchen counter, making her way around the couch and plopping down. She shamelessly watched Billy continue to lift his weights until he spoke.

"Welcome home, Princess." he said sarcastically as he set the weight down, pinching the cigarette between his fingers and blowing a cloud of smoke in Teddi's direction.

Teddi ignored the comment. "Is this what you've been doing all day?" she asked, moving her legs so Billy could sit next to her. He pulled her legs into his lap, offering his cigarette to her. She shook her head.

"What else am I supposed to do? I'm not allowed at school and you're gone all day. I drove around for like three hours this morning. This place fucking sucks." he said, sulking. Teddi couldn't argue there. There wasn't much to do in town to begin with. There was even less to do on a weekday morning.

Teddi let out a small laugh, knocking her foot against his chest. "I'm pretty sure that's the point of suspension. You're kinda supposed to suffer." she teased.

Billy rolled his eyes. "Whatever."

Teddi tilted her head, watching Billy carefully. "Well, what do you expect? No one forced you to knock the shit out of Tommy-"

That had done it. Billy glared over at her. Teddi let out a sigh. "You think I don't know that?" he asked, his lips curled up in a snarl. "I know I fucked up, Teddi. What happened to telling me it was just a slip up?"

Teddi sat up, running a hand over her face. "It *was* a slip up. But you also almost put Tommy in the hospital. You scared a lot of people, Billy. You scared *me*. Acting like this comes with consequences-"

Billy let out a dry laugh. "Thanks, *mom*."

Teddi scoffed, getting up from the couch. "I don't have time for this. I have to change and go to work." she walked towards her room. Billy followed her.

He stood in her doorway, his hands on his hips. "You don't have time for *what* exactly?" he asked.

"I don't have time to deal with you acting like a child who can't understand that he did something wrong. I haven't done anything to you. I'm trying to be supportive. I don't want to come home every day and have you lash out at me because you're bored." she pulled the sweater she had worn to school over her head, tossing it into the

closet and putting on her Family Video shirt.

"I'm not taking anything out on you-" he clenched his jaw tightly. He knew that he was. Teddi had only been trying to joke around with him. He turned around, stomping over to where his denim jacket was thrown over the back of the couch. "I'm going out." he announced.

Teddi sighed. "Going *where*? You're gonna freeze!"

Billy snatched his keys off of the counter. "I don't know, Teddi! Get off my case!" he spat, slamming the door behind him.

Teddi hid her face in her hands, letting out a frustrated groan. This wasn't anything new. They had both fought *plenty* of times before. But this was the first time they had fought since they had become...whatever it was that they had become. Teddi was just going to have to be patient with him. As hard as that was going to be. Sometimes she just wanted to slap him and tell him to stop being such an asshole.

She'd go to work and let him blow off some steam. In a few hours Billy would probably waltz into the video store with Max in tow acting like nothing had happened. She felt a pang of annoyance at that. It was still rare that he apologized. Teddi hated it. If the two of them were going to live together and *be* together things were going to have to change.

Keith was behind the counter when she got to the video store. Teddi hadn't seen him since the news had broken at school that she and Billy had moved in together. Keith leaned over the counter a little, looking Teddi up and down slowly. "...You don't look pregnant." he decided.

Teddi rolled her eyes. "I'm *not* pregnant. Do you believe everything you hear at school?"

"...Not everything. Did you move in with Billy?"

"That's...shut up, Keith. Shouldn't you be over at the arcade?" she huffed, slipping behind the counter and stowing her back in a cabinet.

Keith watched her carefully, like he was studying her. "You're not a very good liar."

Teddi let out an irritated huff. "I'm not *lying*," she argued.

"You're avoiding the truth. Same thing," suddenly he looked bored with her. He jabbed his thumb towards the back of the store. "Heather Holloway's here. She's been waiting for you. I'll be next door." Teddi glared at Keith as he headed out of the video store. Sometimes she wished she could slap him too.

Teddi let out a sigh, rubbing at her forehead. She was starting to get a headache. Heather was back by the drama section. She smiled when she saw Teddi. "Hey!" she greeted, her smile fading into a frown when she saw Teddi's expression. "Jeez, you look like hell. Is everything okay?"

Teddi smiled thinly. "Oh you know...*men*. What's up?"

Heather looked around to make sure no one was listening in. She shrugged, flipping her hair over her shoulder. "I just wanted to check in after yesterday. Are you okay? I heard you hurt your wrist."

"I'm fine. I've had way worse happen before," she waved a hand at Heather. "Have you heard how Tommy's doing?"

"Carol said he's fine. I think he's just embarrassed because he looks like shit and Billy like totally showed him up in front of all his friends," she rolled her eyes. That was a relief to hear. No permanent damage. Well, maybe aside from Tommy's ego. "Is Billy okay? It's totally unfair that he's the only one getting punished."

It was, but Teddi figured that Tommy would weasel his way out of a suspension somehow. "He's...okay," she lied. "He's mostly bored," Heather looked at Teddi carefully, like she wanted to ask something but was too afraid to. Teddi laughed. "What is it, Heather?"

Heather flashed her a sheepish smile. "What's the deal with you two? You can tell me, Teddi. It's not like I'll tell anyone." Teddi knew that she wouldn't. Heather was a good friend. Loyal. And Teddi sort of liked having someone to talk to about Billy that was her own age.

"We're...I don't know," she sighed. "We're together but we're not...together. Does that make sense?"

Heather scrunched up her nose. "Not really." she confessed with a laugh.

Teddi laughed, leaning against one of the shelves. "I told him I wanted to take things slow. I told myself I wasn't even going to date until after I graduated and now I live with the guy." sometimes Teddi didn't even realize what a total 180 her life had done since meeting Billy.

"No dating until graduation? God, *why*?" Heather asked.

"I don't know...I've never had much luck with relationships," she explained. That was sort of an understatement. "I *like* Billy. He's an *asshole*, but..."

"But you don't wanna mess things up with him?" Heather finished for her.

Teddi nodded. "Exactly. So I definitely can't let my hormones take control," the two girls laughed. "Besides, he's being sort of a dick right now anyways." she muttered.

Heather rolled her eyes. "*Boys*."

"*Boys*." Teddi agreed.

"So...wait, did you two actually hook up at that Christmas party?"

The Christmas party. That felt like it had been years ago. "No. *God* no. I was wasted so he took me to his place and I slept in his sister's room."

Heather raised an eyebrow, still not totally convinced. "Billy? Seriously? That sounds so...*nice*."

Teddi smiled and shrugged. "He's not like everyone at school thinks he is. He can be sweet...when he wants to be." she said with a small laugh.

Heather smiled, leaning in like she had a secret. "Are you guys like in love?"

"In love?" Teddi asked with a laugh. "No. No way." she made a face, shaking her head.

"But you moved in together," Heather argued before rolling her eyes. "I mean, I know it's for some reason you don't wanna tell me yet, but you don't just move in with a new boyfriend unless you're in like...a lifetime movie."

Teddi honestly considered it for a moment. *Were* they in love? Maybe. Teddi shook her head. If she was in love there would be no maybe involved, would there? "...Definitely not, Heather. We've got a long way to go still."

Heather only shrugged. "If you say so. I should get going, I'll see you tomorrow at school?" Teddi nodded. "Maybe we can do something this weekend. Billy can come too if he wants. We can see the Breakfast Club!"

"Definitely. He'll be dying to get out of the apartment. I'll ask him."

"Awesome. See ya later, Ted." Heather bumped her hip against Teddi's before heading out.

Teddi's shift went by much faster than she would've liked. She hated how she was dreading going back to the apartment. Things were supposed to be different when she'd moved in with Billy. It was supposed to be a safe place for the both of them, not a place Teddi had to avoid because he was upset with her.

When she got back to the apartment building, she sat in her van for a few minutes. The light inside their apartment was on. The Camaro as sitting next to her van. Billy was up waiting for her. Teddi let out a sigh, finally climbing out of the van and heading upstairs. Billy was sitting on the couch. He'd moved the coffee table back and had showered. Now he was in a pair of sleep shorts and nervously turning the remote in his hands.

"...Hey." he said, not quite meeting her eyes.

Teddi dropped her keys onto the counter, hanging her puffy coat up by the door. "Hi...what're you watching?"

Billy rubbed the back of his neck. "That movie you like with John Travolta and the mechanical bull."

"Urban Cowboy."

"Yeah, that one..." he turned the remote in his hands a few more times. Teddi disappeared into her room before she allowed herself to join Billy on the couch to finish the movie. She changed into her pajamas, walking out to the bathroom. She could sense Billy casting a glance or two her way while she brushed her teeth. Teddi ignored him.

She headed back to her room, closing the door over and shutting her light off before she got into bed. A few moments passed before she heard the TV shut off. Billy was in her doorway now, shifting awkwardly from foot to foot. Teddi rolled over, her back to him.

Billy sighed. "I'm sorry...about earlier. I was a dick," Teddi was surprised to hear him apologize. Just when she thought she had Billy figured out he would surprise her. She didn't say anything back. Teddi only lifted her comforter. Billy slid into bed next to her, wrapping his arm around her and pulling her close to his chest. "This mean you forgive me?"

"As long as you don't do it again."

"...I can't make any promises," he said honestly. "I know what I did was fucked up. I just..."

"You get embarrassed." Teddi finished for him.

"Yeah." he huffed.

Teddi placed one of her hands over Billy's, her nails scratching at his skin softly. "I know. All you can do is move on from this and try to steer yourself in the right direction from there," she said. Billy only hummed in response. Teddi's mind drifted to the conversation she'd had with Heather earlier that day. "...Billy? Have you ever been in love?"

"In love?" he asked. Teddi could hear the smile in his voice. "Definitely not. Where's this coming from?"

Teddi shrugged. "I don't know. Heather was asking me questions today about you and I and she asked why I was so opposed to dating."

Billy was quiet for a moment. "Have *you* ever been in love?"

Teddi chewed on her bottom lip. "...That is a complicated question."

"Well I'm not going anywhere. You wanna explain?"

Teddi thought it over. This was something she hadn't told *anyone* before. Teddi wriggled in Billy's arms, turning over to face him. "...There was this guy named Chris. He was this really punk guy with a green mohawk...although I'm pretty sure I was more in love with his tongue ring rather than *him*," she smiled when Billy let out a snort. Teddi bit her lip, taking in a deep breath. "There was also Hannah." she said finally.

Billy looked at her expectantly, like he was waiting for her to continue when what Teddi said had sunk in. His eyebrows shot up in surprise before he pulled away from her a little. "Hannah," he repeated. "...I'm pretty sure you told me you *weren't* a lesbian."

Teddi rolled her eyes. "Obviously I'm not a lesbian."

"Fine, then I was *half* right," Billy scoffed. "...Is she the one in that picture you had in your room? With the pink hair?" he felt a pang of jealousy. Teddi definitely wouldn't have been too happy if Billy had a picture of him and Cheryl hanging up in his room after they had broken up.

"She doesn't look like that anymore," she shook her head. "We were sixteen. I had just gotten the van and we went camping at the lake with some friends. And we weren't...*together*. Not technically. She was my best friend, and we..." Teddi sighed. "She wanted to date other people so people wouldn't get the wrong idea about us. So that's what I did. Hannah dated and I slept around and then I always felt like shit after. And it went on like that for like...four years."

Teddi's eyes were glossed over with the threat of tears. Billy ran his fingers up and down her spine slowly. "What happened then?" he asked.

Teddi was quiet for a long while. "...I was sleeping over at her house. I did it all the time. Her parents never thought anything of it and they never bothered us so we..." Teddi sighed. "Her mom walked in on us and totally freaked out. She kicked me out and told me I was never allowed to see Hannah again. And then she called my dad," she laughed dryly. "I'm sure you can imagine how that went over. I didn't talk to Hannah for awhile after. I figured I would just wait for it to all blow over and we would just be more careful," she sniffed, shaking her head. "She wouldn't speak to me anymore after that. It was like I didn't exist anymore. Like everything between us had just never happened,"

She let out a soft sob, rubbing her eyes roughly with the back of her hand. "And *everyone* found out. Her mom told *everyone*. Sometimes I think that's why we moved here. Like my dad was so embarrassed of me that he had to run out of town. And he won't even acknowledge it now. I just whore around with *boys* instead of both." she let out another short laugh.

Billy didn't know what to say. This was such a big thing that Teddi was sharing with him. And it definitely wasn't something he'd been expecting. He'd expected her to tell him about some asshole back in New York that maybe cheated on her. He definitely hadn't imagined Teddi going out with someone who was *ashamed* of her. How was that even possible?

"...Fuck Hannah," he finally said. Teddi laughed. "Seriously, Ted. That's..."

"Super shitty?"

"Super shitty." he agreed.

"It was just really fresh when I moved here, and I didn't want to feel like I was with someone who was just using me again. I don't wanna be that girl anymore. I *hated* being that girl." she said quietly.

Billy felt guilty. It made so much sense now. Why she wanted him to stop messing around with Cheryl and why she kept him at arms length. He had been doing to Cheryl what Hannah had done to her. Why should she expect anything different from him? He realized there wasn't anything for him to say. He couldn't promise her that he'd never hurt her. And Teddi knew that. She was willing to take that chance again with him. He felt like he didn't deserve that.

"...You know, Mercury and Bowie are into both too." was all he said. *You're a fucking moron, Hargrove*, he scolded himself.

Teddi let out another small laugh. "What are you doing, Billy?"

"Nothing. I'm just saying..." there was a somewhat awkward silence that fell between them.

Teddi smiled up at him, rolling her eyes. "Out with it."

Billy shifted, rolling onto his back. "Are there any girls here...?" his eyes flickered over in her direction quickly before staring up at the little glow in the dark stars on the ceiling.

Teddi rolled onto her back next to him. She looked like she'd been expecting that question. "You wouldn't ask me if there were any *guys* I was attracted to." she argued.

"Humor me."

Teddi was silent for a long moment. "...I mean, she's a bitch, but *Cheryl*."

Billy let out a snort. "Trust me, I get it."

Teddi laughed. Her lips pursed. "There's also Nanc-"

Billy sat up. "*Nancy Wheeler?*"

He knew that Teddi's cheeks were blushing deeply. She hid her face in her hands. "Don't judge me, Hargrove. I have a thing for a strong jaw and a commanding personality."

Billy groaned, laying back down. "If you ever leave me for Nancy

Wheeler *please* put me out of my misery."

"You know, sometimes you're even more dramatic than I am." Teddi teased.

He scoffed, crossing his arms. "...If I talk to Cheryl-"

"*Billy*."

"I'm just *asking*."

Teddi laughed, looking over at Billy who was grinning at her. He reached out, linking his fingers with her. "So, you're not...?" she asked shyly.

Billy raised an eyebrow. "Not what?"

"I don't know...mad? Creeped out? Grossed out? Anything?"

Billy pulled his hand from Teddi, leaning up on his elbows and looking at her. "What?" he asked with a snort. "Teddi...you and Cheryl together has been a favorite fantasy of mine on *many* lonely nights since I moved here."

He knew she was blushing again. Teddi smiled, covering her face with her hands. "You're so-"

Billy cut her off by leaning in to kiss her. "Don't ruin this for me, Larsson." their eyes met. Teddi's green eyes, looking almost black in the dark room, were still glossed over with tears. Billy felt relieved when he didn't see fear there anymore.

Teddi bit her lip, running her fingers through his curls before she kissed him. "*Sweet dreams*, Hargrove." she teased.

Maybe she did love Billy...maybe it was okay that there was a maybe involved.

21. Chapter 21

A/N: It's a Thanksgiving miracle I've finally finished the chapter. I'm sorry this is so late! We're heading into the summer of '85 now, but don't worry! I'll be writing a few chapters of Chasing Yesterday to fill in the spaces between Billy and Teddi moving in together and now. I just didn't want things to feel too clunky. This chapter also ends a tad awkwardly, but I'm breaking it into two parts so the chapters don't get too long. Hope you enjoy!

xxx

The Hawkins public pool was packed to the brim with people. As Teddi hopped out of her van and made her way through the parking lot, the sound of splashing, kids yelling and laughing and the Power of Love playing on someone's boombox nearby grew louder and louder. Today was her day off, but since everyone she knew was working Teddi decided laying out by the pool was probably a better decision than staying home and watching Star Trek reruns all day.

Teddi made her way inside the gates, passing the bulletin board that read "Meet our '85 swim season lifeguards" in large yellow letters. Teddi's photo was between Heather and Billy's. Her hair was longer than it had been when she moved to Hawkins and no longer platinum. Heather had helped her dye it a more natural, golden, honey blonde at the beginning of the summer. The silver ring that had been through her right nostril had been replaced with a thin gold ring that Billy had gotten her simply to match the small gold hoop that was in his ear now (the silver dangly earring Billy had been wearing before was now in Teddi's ear). Teddi was smiling brightly at the camera, which was a stark contrast from the cool, almost bored expression that was on Billy's face in his photo.

"Hey, Katie." she said with a smile as she passed by the front desk. Katie was sitting with her feet up on the counter and a magazine in her lap. Katie threw a wave in Teddi's direction, not bothering to look up. Heather was perched up in the lifeguard's chair, glaring down at a group of kids who were running over to the diving boards. Heather waved at her before blowing her whistle at the kids loudly.

Teddi walked over to the tiny snack bar window, smiling tentatively at the girl on the other side. Cheryl Burns had gotten a job at the pool at the beginning of the summer. Initially she had applied to be a lifeguard, but had quickly changed her mind. "You mean if someone totally disgusting starts drowning or whatever I have to like...give them mouth to mouth? *Gross*. No thanks." were her exact words. So Freddy had stuck her at the snack bar. She of course hated it.

Cheryl's strawberry blonde hair sat high up on her head in a ponytail. She brushed her feathered bangs out of her eyes, her eyebrows raising expectantly at Teddi. "...Coke, please." Teddi squeaked out. Cheryl was an intimidating girl, and she knew it. Sometimes Teddi was certain that Cheryl enjoyed making her nervous.

Cheryl set down the can of coke in front of Teddi, sneering at it in disgust. "I don't know how you drink that shit," she jabbed one of her long, painted nails at the "New Coke" logo. "They totally ruined it." she held her out towards Teddi.

Teddi dropped her change into Cheryl's hand. "It's not that bad...you get used to it."

Cheryl rolled her eyes. "I'd rather shove old man Myers' speedo in my mouth," she scoffed, tossing her ponytail over her shoulder. Cheryl was also the most dramatic person Teddi had ever met. Cheryl looked back at the red clock on the wall behind her, a smirk forming on her lips as she leaned forward. "Here comes lover boy," she said in a sweet, sing songy tone, nodding her head towards the locker rooms.

Teddi turned just as Billy was walking out. While Teddi enjoyed the summer time, Billy came alive in it. It brought out the Cali boy in him like flowers that bloomed with the warm weather. His sandy blonde hair had turned a few shades lighter in the sun. His skin was a deep, golden bronze. Billy had gotten a new air of confidence about him ever since he'd move out, but now it was something different. Something that Teddi wasn't the only one to notice.

Karen Wheeler and a few of the other moms showed up to the pool every day around mid afternoon for Billy's shift. They weren't very secretive about it either. Heather would climb down from the lifeguard chair and each of them would start adjusting their

swimsuits and makeup while they waited for Billy to come out.

"Look at them," Cheryl scoffed. "It's so *gross* how they're all drooling over him. I mean, Karen has a kid his age. And like he'd want some dried up old hag anyways," she said with an eye roll. "You should go over there and like french him or something and tell that tacky bitch to back off. I mean, who the fuck wears a *pearl necklace* to a pool?"

Teddi couldn't help but laugh. She pulled her eyes from Billy, turning back to Cheryl. "Cheryl, do you always have to be so...*blunt*?" she asked, taking a sip of her coke.

Cheryl pursed her glossy lips. "I'm a leo. It's what we do," she said matter of factly. Teddi coughed on her soda, sputtering loudly. "Jesus, *Larsson*. Say it, don't spray it." Cheryl frowned, leaning away from Teddi.

"Sorry," Teddi cleared her throat. "Sorry...I'm gonna go. Always a pleasure chatting with you, Cheryl." she gave the blonde an awkward salute, wincing at herself as she spun around on her heel and heading over to Billy.

Billy smirked down at Teddi as he watched her approach him, pushing his sunglasses down his nose to look at her. "You stalkin' me, Larsson?" he teased. Teddi stepped up onto a bar at the bottom of the lifeguard chair, balancing carefully as she reached up to kiss Billy. She laughed when she felt his fingers slipping into the back of her cut off shorts, smacking his hand away. No doubt a show for the group of eyes that were glaring a hole into Teddi behind her.

"Aren't you a little over dressed for the pool?" he asked, his hand resting on her lower back.

"Cool your jets. I'm gonna change," she rolled her eyes. "Are you busy tomorrow?"

Billy looked at her coolly. "...Depends."

Teddi let out a huff. "Depends on *what*?"

"On what you're gonna ask me to do...and which bikini you're wearing under there." he was smirking again.

Teddi pulled a face, popping her hip slightly and raising an eyebrow. "Who says I'm wearing anything under this?"

Billy's smirk twitched just slightly before he looked over the top of his glasses at her again, his eyes trained on the white crop top that was covered in little daisies that Teddi was wearing before looking back at her. "...Where am I going?"

Teddi laughed. Sometimes it was just too easy. "It's El's birthday tomorrow. Hop's having a party for her at the cabin and then she and Max are sleeping over at our place." dinner at Hopper's cabin had become a regular weekly thing for Billy and Teddi. He'd started to invite them over after the fight between Billy and Tommy. Billy had of course been closed off to the idea at first. Teddi had gone to the cabin alone for about the first three weeks before she convinced him to join her.

"You want me to go to some 13 year old's birthday party?" he asked.

"She's 14 now."

"*Whatever.*"

"Oh come on," Teddi huffed. "It'll be fun. There's cake. How can you say no to cake?"

Billy held up his hands. "*I'll go.* But don't expect me to play pin the tail on the donkey or whatever the hell those little dorks do at parties," he grumbled. Teddi rolled her eyes. "Speaking of birthdays...what do you wanna do for yours?"

Teddi let out a groan. Her 18th birthday was in a week and she'd been trying her damndest not to think about it. "I don't know...do we have to do anything?"

Billy shot her a look. "If I tried that with *my* birthday would that work?"

Teddi sighed "No..."

"What'd you used to do back home?" he asked.

Teddi thought about it. Birthdays in her family had never really been a very big deal. Her parents hadn't even celebrated their own unless you counted the fancy new purse her dad would buy her mother every year. "...Me and Hannah would drive into the city and we'd ride the Staten Island ferry back and forth for a few hours and smoke weed." she finally said.

Billy laughed. "Jesus, Larsson. As fun as that sounds, you got any other ideas?"

"Well what did *you* do for your 18th birthday?" she asked with an irritated sigh.

Billy smirked. "Cheryl." he said with a snort.

"Ugh. You're disgusting," she groaned, Billy chuckling at her. "As fun as *that* sounds, I think I'd rather just go to the movies or something. Maybe we can go to Starcourt and bring Max and El." she suggested.

Billy's smile faltered for just a moment. "Whatever you say, Birthday Girl." he said coolly.

Teddi frowned slightly, pulling away from him. "...I'm gonna go find a lounge and read for awhile. You gonna come see me after you're done up here?" she asked. Billy's smile was back as he nodded and leaned in to kiss her again as if nothing had happened. Teddi hopped down, not looking at Karen and her friends as she passed them and headed for an empty chair by the pool.

She started to wonder almost obsessively about the look on Billy's face when she suggested going to the movies as she peeled her crop top and shorts off. She knew that he was watching her strip down to her bright green bikini, but didn't turn to look at him. Had he maybe planned something different? Was it because she wanted to go with El and Max? When it came to Billy there was really no telling what was going on in his head.

Teddi let out a heavy sigh, plopping down onto the white lounge and pulling her copy of the Fellowship of the Rings out of her bag. With her sunglasses on, she allowed herself to peek back at Billy as she pretended to read. He was watching her with a sort of confused

frown before his jaw set tightly and he turned away from her.

He was *definitely* up to something.

xxx

Teddi was sitting on the floor in front of the couch, chewing on her bottom lip as she carefully folded the bright purple wrapping paper around the stack of books she'd gotten El for her birthday. Teddi had picked them out carefully. There was the Princess Bride, Alice in Wonderland and the Last Unicorn; each bound in intricate covers with a short message that Teddi had written inside each of them.

The phone started ringing as she scrawled *From Teddi and Billy* on the little tag she'd stuck to the wrapping paper. "I got it," Billy called from his room. Teddi didn't pay much attention to him. She grabbed a smaller present, wrapped in the same purple paper, and set it on top of the other, larger present. "Yeah?...Oh, yeah hi," Billy threw a look over at Teddi before he turned from her, lowering his voice to speak to whoever was on the other end.

Teddi watched him with a frown. She grabbed the TV remote, muting the Starcourt commercial that was playing so she could hear a little better. "Just give me like...an hour. I'll be there. Yeah. Alright, I'll see you then." Billy hung up. He turned, going still when he met Teddi's eyes. She crossed her arms.

"Who was that?" she asked.

Billy shifted awkwardly, rubbing the back of his neck. "Nobody...uh, look Ted, I know I said I'd go to El's party..."

"You're *cancelling*? Billy, we were supposed to leave like ten minutes ago." she huffed. Teddi stood, scooping the gifts into her arms.

"Something came up is all. I gotta..." he shook his head. "I just gotta be somewhere, okay? El's not gonna give a shit that I'm not there." his tone was starting to get a little colder. Like Teddi was accusing him of something. It only made her more suspicious.

"You *know* that that's not true," she argued. While Teddi and El had grown significantly closer over the last few months, Billy had also

(begrudgingly) bonded with her much to Teddi's surprise. "What's going on here? You're acting really weird. Why can't I know where you're going?"

She was trying to keep her tone light, playful. She even let out a little laugh at the end like she was teasing him. Billy's jaw clenched, and Teddi's stomach dropped. "...I gotta go. I'll see you later. Tell El I said happy birthday." he muttered, grabbing his keys and quickly walking out.

Teddi glared at the door. The Camaro's engine rumbled in the distance, slowly disappearing as Billy drove off. "Of all the nights to pull this shit..." she mumbled to herself, nearly stomping over to the kitchen counter and snatching up her keys. She spent the drive back into Hawkins going over theories to herself. Teddi found herself feeling ashamed when she wondered if maybe there was someone else.

She liked to think that if Billy *was* cheating on her he'd hide it better. Or maybe that was just her ego. It was *Billy* after all. Teddi let out a heavy sigh. It had to be something else. She just had absolutely no idea what it could be.

When she arrived at the cabin she pushed Billy from her mind. She wouldn't let this ruin the party. Teddi grabbed the presents, hopping out of the van and heading up the porch, her boots thumping against the old wood. Hopper answered when she knocked.

"Hey, kiddo," he grinned down at her, his eyes immediately looking over to the empty space beside her. "...No Billy?" he asked, his eyebrows raised.

"Something came up last minute," she explained, trying to keep her tone neutral. "It's probably for the best. I'm sure he'd complain about the cake ruining his physique or something."

Hopper chuckled and stepped aside to let Teddi in. He'd traded in his uniform for some jeans an old plaid button up. Teddi always thought he looked less intimidating in his own clothes. More like a dad that liked to tell cheesy jokes...which was exactly what Hopper was.

The kids were all already there aside from Dustin, who was off at summer camp. They were all crowded around the dinner table playing a game of Candyland. The cabin was decorated with colorful streamers, balloons and a big banner that read Happy Birthday! was hanging above the kitchen. There was a small cake sitting out on the counter waiting for it's candles. It was a soft yellow color with bright pink piping and Happy Birthday El scrawled in shaky lettering that Teddi assumed belonged to Hopper.

"Teddi!" El said, smiling brightly at her before pushing her chair back and hurrying over to the blonde. Teddi set her presents aside before wrapping her in a tight hug.

"Jeez, Ellie Bean. When'd you get so tall? I don't have to bend down to hug you anymore." she laughed. All of the kids had hit a growth spurt over the summer. Teddi no longer towered over them. She wasn't really sure when it had happened exactly. It was like one day suddenly Mike was *taller* than she was and she'd nearly had an existential crisis.

El let out a small laugh. "Hop says I'm not allowed to get any taller."

"He's right." Teddi muttered.

"...Where's Billy?" El asked, peering out one of the front windows as if she expected to see Billy smoking out on the porch.

Teddi winced a little at her disappointed expression. "He's not gonna be able to make it. Something came up, I guess. He told me to tell you happy birthday."

That had gotten Max's attention. The redhead looked away from the board game, looking at Teddi suspiciously. "What do you mean something came up? Did you guys break up?" she asked.

Teddi let out a sigh. "No...it's a long story. I'd rather not talk about it." she mumbled, heading over to the fridge to grab a drink. El and Max shared a knowing look. They'd agree to drop the subject. For now.

"Hey, how come we can't go to the sleepover?" Lucas asked as Teddi pulled a seat up to the game.

Max rolled her eyes. "Because it's a *girl's night*, genius. None of you are girls."

"That's pretty sexist of you guys." Mike argued.

Hopper scoffed loudly from his spot on the couch. "Quit while you're behind, Wheeler."

"What do you guys even do during a girl's night?" Lucas asked, looking between the three girls.

"Summon demons." Teddi said with a straight face.

Mike, Lucas and Will all shared a look. "...I'm pretty sure she's kidding." Will finally decided.

After the game of Candyland (Mike won, but Lucas had accused him of cheating) they all crowded around El to sing happy birthday and eat cake. After the presents had been opened, Teddi held up the smaller gift she had wrapped earlier, motioning to El to follow her out to the porch.

She handed the small, but long box to the teen with an almost embarrassed look. El smiled at her, making quick work of ripping the paper open. Inside the white box was quite frankly one of the tackiest necklaces Teddi had ever seen. It had a clunky, golden chain and a deep blue stone at the end of it. In the stone there was a constellation that was almost crudely carved into the stone.

"When I was little and my dad started working for the city, he took me and my mom to this state fair so he could make himself look good for his bosses. There were all these game stands, and one of them was this little pool that had these little rubber ducks in it. You got to pick three of them, and if you picked the right one you got a prize. So I begged him over and over to let me play and I ended up winning that *horrible* necklace," she said, her and El both laughing. "It's how I found out I was a gemini. The girl that worked at the stand was a total hippie and gave it to me when I told her my birthday. The stone is supposed to be our birthstone and then that's the gemini constellation...I don't know. I found it again after I moved in with Billy and I thought you should have it. It's ugly in kind of a cool

way."

El held the necklace up, smiling up at Teddi. "I love it."

"Yeah?" Teddi asked, letting out a relieved sigh. "Good! Here," she took the necklace from El, twirling her finger to tell her to turn around and clasped it around her neck. El turned back towards Teddi, taking the small pendant between her fingers. "Perfect. Come on, we should go get Max and head out before Hop tries to kill Mike." Teddi snickered.

The two girls headed inside, El hurrying over to Max and pulling her to her room to grab their things. Hopper looked so relieved Teddi thought he might cry. He stood up from the couch, waving his hands at the door. "Alright, boys, the party's over. You don't have to go home, but you have to get the hell outta my house."

"This is totally unfair!" Mike complained. "I can't spend time with my girlfriend on her birthday because of *girl's night*?"

"How 'bout you complain to someone who cares, Wheeler. Let's go." Hopper said, herding him towards the door. El and Max came running back out, arms full with their bags and sleeping bags. Lucas and Will wished her happy birthday again before practically dragging Mike out to their bikes.

"Don't worry chief, I'll take good care of them," Teddi said, placing her hands on El and Max's heads. "We're gonna make crank calls and break out the ouija board."

Hopper smiled thinly at her. "*Funny*. You two be good, alright? No boys or ritual sacrifices," he leaned forward, hugging El and placing a kiss on her head. "Happy birthday, kid." he said, smiling down fondly at his daughter.

Once the three girls were in the van and headed back for the apartment, Max spoke up. "So...what's going on with Billy? Is he being an ass again?"

"What happened to not talking about it?" Teddi asked.

"*Why not*? The boys aren't here. So, what did he do? What was this

thing that suddenly came up?" Max asked, leaning forward excitedly.

Teddi looked at the two girls in the rearview mirror before letting out a sigh. "...I'm not really sure yet. Someone called right before we were supposed to leave for the party and he said he had to go. And when I asked him what was going on he got all...weird."

Max and El looked at each other. "Weird how? Like *weird* weird, or Billy weird?"

"Billy weird. He's been acting like this all day. Like he's keeping a secret or something."

"We should find him." El said with a firm nod.

Teddi laughed. "Find him and do *what*? Spy on him?"

Max looked at her as if the answer was obvious. "Duh. If he's with someone else you can catch him in the act and dump his ass."

Teddi actually considered it for a moment before shaking her head. "That's insane. What about the sleepover? And how would we even find him? You want me to drive all around Hawkins all night?"

"We can still have the sleepover later," Max shook her head. El shot her best friend a brief, knowing look. Max looked back at Teddi with an unsure expression. "...El can find him."

"Oh yeah? How?"

El smiled at Teddi sheepishly. "...Long story."

22. Chapter 22

A/N: Writer's block is a very weird thing, my dudes. I had about half of this chapter written in like an hour and then I just could NOT finish it. But it's here now! We're getting closer and closer to the nightmare that is the Mind Flayer. Who else is excited?

xxx

By the time Teddi, El and Max made it back to the apartment, the two girls had filled Teddi in on everything from Demogorgons, to secret government labs, to alternate dimensions out in the woods. Teddi had been uncharacteristically quiet through all of it.

"So you're saying...that El has magic, *psychic* powers and that monsters from Dungeons and Dragons, a *board game*, kidnapped *Will* and possessed him?" she asked finally after she'd spent nearly three entire minutes starting quietly at Max and El.

"I mean, that's the short version..." Max muttered. "Everything got quiet right when you moved here. We got rid of the Mind Flayer and things went back to normal...for the most part."

Teddi's eyebrows came together in a confused frown. "...Are you two messing with me right now? How long did it take you to come up with all of this? I gotta say, it's pretty impressive," she laughed. "You like *actually* had me there for a second-"

Max looked over at El and shot her a look that Teddi was familiar with. It was like they were judging someone without speaking a word. El shifted in her seat a little, turning towards the TV and taking in a deep breath. Teddi opened her mouth to ask what she was doing, the sound cut off with a gasp as the TV came to life. Teddi jumped, falling further back against the couch. "...H-how...?" she asked with wide eyes. The TV shut off again.

El wasn't finished yet. The stack of magazines on the coffee table in front of them rose up into the air, each issue shuffling together before landing back on the table in a neat stack. Teddi's mouth was hanging open as she stared down hard at the magazines. "...Holy shit," she

breathed out. The two girls watched carefully as she stood up, moving around the couch and to the fridge. She grabbed one of Billy's beers, popping the tab and taking a long swig. "*Holy shit.*"

"You sound like Steve." Max joked, she and El letting out small laughs.

Teddi wiped the foam from her lips with the back of her hand, letting out a loud scoff. "Wait, *what?* Steve knows about all of this and I don't? *Steve Harrington?*"

"He helped Nancy and Johnathan catch the Demogorgon when Will went missing," Max explained. "Then he helped us destroy the Demodog nest last year."

"Nancy and Jonathan know? Am I the only person around here that doesn't know about all of this?" Teddi asked, crossing her arms tightly across her chest.

"Billy doesn't know." El assured her.

"Yeah, I stabbed him in the neck with tranquilizers when he tried to kill Steve at the Byers' place." Max said with a proud look.

"*What?!*" Teddi blanched.

Max rolled her eyes. "We have other things we should be focusing on right now. Like finding Billy and figuring out what he's up to."

Teddi had no idea how she was supposed to focus on whatever it was that Billy was doing now. She had suddenly stumbled into a fantasy world that was straight out of the books she loved to read. How could she possibly worry about boys when there might be monsters running around Hawkins?

"You know...when you said El could find Billy, I thought you were gonna just suggest we star 69 the last number that called." Teddi finally said.

El and Max gave each other another look. "...This way's more fun." El finally said.

Teddi couldn't argue there. "Well what do we do? How does this work? I was kidding earlier about the ouija board but I totally have one in my closet-"

El laughed, shaking her head. "I need a radio. And a blindfold."

Teddi didn't need to hear anymore. She hurried off to Billy's room, grabbing his boombox and yanking the cord from the wall. There was a brief moment when she thought that she could *probably* find something Billy had used as a blindfold at some point, but shuddered at the thought. Instead she grabbed a pink bandana from her room, bringing the radio and the blindfold back out to the tiny living room.

El sat with her back to the TV. She tied the bandana around her eyes while Max plugged the stereo in and set it next to her. El had done this a handful of times before with Max. They liked to spy on the boys whenever they got bored. It was simple enough, but El had to admit she was sort of dreading what she might see once she found Billy.

El couldn't see Teddi, but she could practically feel her nervous, jittery energy from the couch. "So how does this work? Is it like telekinetic powers or something? Like Jean Grey?" Teddi asked, her words were quick and almost jumbled together.

"Teddi," Max laughed. "You have to be quiet."

Teddi mumbled out a sorry, the room growing quiet. El sat up straight, taking in a deep breath. Nothing happened at first. El let the breath she'd been holding in out slowly. There was a low hum of electricity that filled the tiny apartment. The tips of El's fingers felt tingly, like she had shocked herself. The feeling travelled up her arms, the lights flickering around them as the room almost groaned under the weight of her powers.

"Your *nose*!" Teddi breathed out. El could hear her get up from her seat, ready to wipe away the small trail of blood that was probably running down El's nose. She never really felt it when it happened anymore.

"It's *fine*. It happens when she uses her powers sometimes." Max

explained.

"Guys." El mumbled.

"..Sorry." Teddi and Max said. Eventually El found Billy. She always found it harder to find Billy than it was Mike or any of the boys or even Teddi. She didn't know *why*. Sometimes she felt like somehow he knew she was watching him and was trying to push her away. It didn't feel like that now at least. El almost immediately felt guilty for prying.

"I see him," El finally said. Max perked up, Teddi leaning forwards against the coffee table. El frowned as Billy's surroundings started to slowly appear around him. There were shelves of books around him. And a pretty girl. She was smiling up at him. "He's...there's books." she said with a slight frown.

Teddi raised an eyebrow. "*Books?* Yeah right. Is it possible for her powers to be broken?" she asked. Max let out a snort. El didn't answer.

"There's a girl," El mumbled. She leaned forward to get a better look at the name tag she was wearing. "...Mckenna?"

"Who the fuck's Mckenna?"

"*Max*," Teddi said sternly. There was a long pause before Teddi finally spoke again. "...It's gotta be Mckenna Prescott. She went to school with us. I'm pretty sure she works at the bookstore at the mall. But Mckenna's *nice*. I mean, I *thought* she was..." Teddi said with a frown.

El watched Billy flash a charming smile down at Mckenna. He leaned against one of the shelves casually, tucking a hand in one of his pockets. "I really appreciate this, Mckenna. You're a lifesaver." he said coolly.

Mckenna giggled, giving her chocolatey hair a dramatic shake. "It's no problem, *Billy*," El hated how she said his name. She let out a small 'blech' sound. "I think it's in the back room. Follow me."

Billy, Mckenna and the bookshelves started to slowly fade away like a cloud of smoke as the two walked off. El frowned hard at what she

had just seen. Was it suspicious? *Definitely*. Did it make any *sense*? Not even close. She pulled the bandana off, her eyes immediately falling on Teddi.

Teddi looked almost scared. Like she was waiting for El to tell her something horrible. It *sounded* horrible. El wanted to believe that there was something about this that she was missing. Something that would prove that Billy wasn't the guy that everyone thought he was.

"...That's all I could see," El finally lied. "He's too far, I think."

Max and Teddi both noticeably deflated. "Well should we go to the mall?" Max asked, her head whipping over towards Teddi.

Teddi had settled back into that unusual silence. She watched El, like she knew she was lying and was waiting for her to crack. Hop gave her that look sometimes too. It never made her feel as guilty as it was now. Eventually Teddi shook her head. "No. That's...no. I'm sure it's fine, right? We're just being paranoid," it was obvious she was trying to convince herself as well as Max. "Let's just watch some movies and forget all about Billy. We can order pizza."

It was like El blinked and Teddi was suddenly back to normal. Her bright, cheery smile was back and she was holding her shoulders up high. El wondered how often Teddi kept that facade up. How often she was *genuinely* smiling rather than convincing everyone she was.

Teddi downed the rest of the beer, pushing herself up off the floor and heading over to the phone to order the pizza. Max shot El a look. "...What?" El asked, a defensive frown on her face.

Max narrowed her eyes at her best friend. "...Did you see something else?"

El's eyes flickered instinctively towards Teddi. She paused for a moment before shaking her head. "No. Nothing," she lied.

xxx

It was *late*. Billy's hands gripped tightly at the steering wheel as he pressed down on the gas a little harder. He felt like shit for skipping out on the party and lying to Teddi. But adding on the fact that it was

pushing midnight and he had just driven two towns over made him dread going back home and trying to explain himself.

His eyes flickered over to the brown paper bag sitting in the seat beside him. He'd been searching for the perfect gift for Teddi for almost a month. About a week ago he'd driven out to Star Court while Teddi was at work and asked Mckenna if she could help him get his hands on it. Billy didn't know her very well. They'd had maybe one class together in high school, but like *most* girls in Hawkins, Mckenna had a thing for Billy and was more than willing to help him out. So he flirted with her a little to get what he wanted. It was harmless. He definitely wouldn't be telling *Teddi* about it, but it was totally harmless.

After he'd shown up to the mall, Mckenna had started talking his ear off about what she'd been up to in the *month* since they'd graduated. Billy had done his best to pretend to care. She was doing him a *favor* after all. But after he realized he'd been standing in the bookstore for over half an hour, he decided to give her a little push. A lot of good that had done.

"Oh *god*. I think Josh must've sold it. I told him like *nine million times* I was holding it for you!" she'd said when she had all but dragged him to the back room. So Billy had to wait for Mckenna to call what felt like *every* bookstore in all of Indiana until she found one that had what he was looking for. Of course the store was over an hour away.

Billy parked the Camaro next to Teddi's van. The lights were still on in the apartment. Billy let out a frustrated huff, grabbing the brown paper bag and heading up to the apartment. The girls were all asleep. Teddi was sprawled out on the couch with Max tucked against her side. El was curled up in a makeshift fort they'd built with Teddi's sleeping bag and Billy's comforter. The TV was still on. Billy assumed from the bright blue screen that they'd fallen asleep in the middle of a movie. There were soda and beer cans and a box of half eaten pizza littering the coffee table.

"...Billy?" it was El. She leaned up on her elbows, rubbing the sleep from her eyes as she blinked up at him.

Billy dropped his keys onto the kitchen counter along with the brown

paper bag. He shifted awkwardly. "Hey...sorry, I didn't mean to wake you up."

El shook her head. "Had to pee...where were you?"

If Billy imagined El, Max and Teddi sitting around the cabin with the boys probably playing dungeons and dorks, he would be *glad* that he missed her birthday. But looking at El, with those big, sad brown eyes of hers made him remember how sad Teddi had looked when she was talking about her own birthday. Had Billy wanted to spend the night with her alone? Of course. But Teddi wanted to spend her birthday with him, El and Max. Her *family*. He hated himself.

Billy looked down at Teddi. She was sound asleep, snoring a little into Max's hair. He tentatively reached out for the brown paper bag, moving around the couch and kneeling down in front of El. She was wearing that god awful necklace Teddi had found. Billy felt his lips twitch in a small grin. "I uh...I was getting this. For Teddi. It's a secret though." he held the bag out to her.

El frowned a little, leaning forwards to peek inside. She mouthed the words on the cover to herself as she read it before smiling up at him. "For her birthday." it wasn't a question.

"Yeah. Kinda had to go on a hunt for it...sorry I missed your party."

"It's fine. We brought cake home for you. It's in the fridge." she said, pulling her knees to her chest.

Billy let out a small laugh, reaching forward to ruffle her hair. "Thanks, Punky."

El raised an eyebrow. "What's Punky?"

"Y'know...Punky Brewster. It's a show. Jesus, what's Teddi teaching you kids?" he looked over his shoulder to where Teddi was sleeping on the couch. He briefly looked at the beer cans on the table before looking back at El. "She get drunk?"

"A little," El confessed. "Not too bad..."

"She mad at me?"

"More sad...she thinks you're with other girls."

Billy felt a jolt of guilt through his chest. "Yeah, I was worried she might think that..." he sighed. "Get some sleep, kid. We can all go out tomorrow, make up for me missing the party, okay? Whatever you want."

El eyed him carefully. "...Promise?"

"Have I ever broken a promise?" he asked. El shot him a look. Billy let out a small, dry laugh, rolling his eyes lazily. "...Okay, fine. I *promise*."

El smiled up at him, nodding before getting up and hurrying off to the bathroom. Billy stood, running a hand through his hair and letting out a sigh. Carefully he leaned over Max, easily scooping Teddi up into his arms and off the couch. Max grumbled quietly, shifting over into a more comfortable position.

He navigated the messy living room, heading into Teddi's room and gently setting her on her bed. Teddi let out a low groan, rolling onto her back and blinking up at Billy. Her lipgloss and eyeliner were smudged. "The hell have you been?" she asked, her voice slurring slightly.

"Out." Billy said evenly.

Teddi let out a heavy sigh, rubbing at her eyes and smudging her makeup further. "Look, I *know* you were out with someone else. Why can't you just like *man up* and break up with me if you don't wanna do this anymore-"

"The hell are you talking about, Larsson? I wasn't out with anyone. I had something I had to do."

Teddi sat up slowly, swaying a little as she glared up at him. "And this something was more important than El's birthday?"

"Can we talk about this later when you're not drunk?" he huffed, his hands resting angrily on his hips. Teddi's expression didn't waver. Billy ran a frustrated hand over his face. "You just gotta trust me, okay? I told El I was sorry." Teddi's expression softened a little.

She held out her middle finger to him. "You promise you weren't out being a rat bastard?"

Billy laughed softly, groaning a little as he hooked his finger with hers. "You chicks are big on promises, huh? Yeah, fine. *I promise*," he wrapped his arm around her middle, easily lifting Teddi up and moving her over to make room for himself. Teddi squeaked as he tossed her, grabbing fists full of his t-shirt. "You still mad at me?" he asked as he settled next to her.

"Yes...a little," she sighed. "The keeping stuff from each other just gives me this like...icky feeling." she confessed.

"I'm not...I mean, except for now. But you're gonna have to deal with it, Larsson," Teddi let out a scoff, letting his shirt go and crossing her arms tightly across her chest. Billy chuckled, leaning over his girlfriend and pressing a few kisses to the base of her neck. "You know," he mumbled against her collarbone. "If it helps, I felt guilty about skipping out."

"You mean you're capable of that emotion?" Teddi asked dryly.

"*Funny*."

Teddi gave Billy's chest a soft push, their eyes meeting. "Okay, but like...what if you *killed* a guy?" she asked. Billy blinked down at her. "You'd tell me right?"

Billy was silent for a few moments before letting out a laugh. "What are we, Bonnie and Clyde? You gonna help me hide the body, Weird Girl?"

"It's *hypothetical*, smartass."

"Fine," Billy grinned. "The second I off someone, you're the first person I'm gonna call," Teddi seemed genuinely pleased with this answer. "You know, you're even weirder when you're drunk." he teased, leaning down to kiss her.

"If you two are gonna make out all night, can you at least close the door? I so don't wanna hear this." Max called out from the couch.

Teddi smiled against Billy's lips, breaking out into a fit of giggles. "Sorry, Max!" she called back, pushing a grumbling Billy towards her bedroom door.

"I thought you were still mad at me?" he asked, shutting the door and stripping down to his underwear.

"I am. But we used your blanket to make the fort so it's only fair," Teddi explained, wriggling out of her cut off shorts and throwing them across the room. "Let me sleep on that side though, I might have to puke later." she said, reaching for the small trash can that sat next to her nightstand.

"...Sure know how to get a guy hot, Ted." Billy muttered, grabbing the trash can and setting it next to the bed. Once they were both settled, Teddi tucked against Billy's chest with his chin resting on her head, it didn't take long for Teddi to fall back asleep.

Billy briefly wondered when this had become his life. Living with a girl he loved, sharing a bed almost every single night, family dinners at Hopper's on the weekends. He was *happy*. That loud, angry voice that had at one point controlled almost everything he did barely spoke to him anymore. It scared him a little. Like he was turning into that annoying gold droid in those stupid Star Wars movies Teddi had forced him to watch that was always saying *I've got a bad feeling about this*.

He shoved those worries aside. His arm tightened around Teddi, her hand mindlessly reaching down to rest on his forearm as she snuggled deeper into her pillow. They deserved to be happy. Billy wasn't going to fall for that self fulfilling prophecy bullshit Teddi was always talking about (he was *pretty* sure he understood what it was at this point).

What could possibly stand in their way?